PZ
3
.V244
T

FT MEADE
GenColl

No. 741 *Harold Vallings* 50 CENTS

Entered at the Post-Office at New York, as Second-class Mail Matter. Issued Monthly. Subscription Price per Year, 12 Nos., $7.50.

THE TRANSGRESSION OF TERENCE CLANCY

A Novel

BY

HAROLD VALLINGS

NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS
DECEMBER, 1893

HARPER'S FRANKLIN SQUARE LIBRARY.—LATEST ISSUES.

CENTS.

741. The Transgression of Terence Clancy. A Novel. By Harold Vallings..... 50
740. The Burden of Isabel. A Novel. By J. Maclaren Cobban..... 50
739. Dr. Mirabel's Theory. A Psychological Study. By Ross George Dering..... 50
738. Half a Hero. A Novel. By Anthony Hope.... 50
737. The Nameless City. A Novel. By Stephen Grail..... 50
736. The World of Chance. A Novel. By W. D. Howells..... 60
735. Debit and Credit. A Novel. By Gustav Freytag. Translated by L. C. C..... 60
734. A Wasted Crime. A Novel. By David Christie Murray..... 50
733. In a Promised Land. A Novel. By M. A. Bengough..... 50
732. An Imperative Duty. A Novel. By W. D. Howells 50
731. A Girl with a Temper. A Novel. By H. B. Finlay Knight..... 50
730. The Veiled Hand. A Novel. By Frederick Wicks..... 50
729. In Summer Shade. A Novel. By Mary E. Mann 50
728. The Silent Sea. A Novel. By Mrs. A. Macleod. 50
727. An Exquisite Fool. A Novel..... 50
726. The Quality of Mercy. A Novel. By W. D. Howells..... 75
725. Charming to her Latest Day. A Novel. By Alan Muir..... 50
724. A Man's Conscience. A Novel. By Avery Macalpine. Illustrated..... 50
723. Verbena Camellia Stephanotis, and Other Stories. By Walter Besant..... 50
722. A Transplanted Rose: A Story of New York Society. By Mrs. John Sherwood..... 50
721. A Charge for France, and Other Stories. By John Heard, Jr. Illustrated..... 50
720. The Blacksmith of Voe. A Novel. By Paul Cushing..... 50
719. The Jonah of Lucky Valley and Other Stories. By Howard Seely. Illustrated..... 50
718. A New Saint's Tragedy. A Novel. By Thomas A. Pinkerton..... 50
717. Ruling the Planets. A Novel. By Mina E. Burton 50
716. The Baroness. A Novel. By Frances Mary Peard. 50
715. Mrs. Dines's Jewels. A Mid-Atlantic Romance. By W. Clark Russell. Illustrated..... 50
714. Cut With His Own Diamond. A Novel. By Paul Cushing..... 50
713. Mr. East's Experiences in Mr. Bellamy's World. By Conrad Wilbrandt. Translated from the German by Mary J. Safford..... 50
712. Evelyn's Career. A Novel. By the Author of "My Wife's Niece," etc..... 60
711. Elsa. By E. McQueen Gray..... 50
710. Dumaresq's Daughter. By Grant Allen..... 50
709. Miss Maxwell's Affections. By Richard Pryce.. 50
708. Judith Trachtenberg. By Karl Emil Franzos. Translated by (Mrs.) L. P. and C. T. Lewis.... 40
707. The Uncle of an Angel, and Other Stories. By Thomas A. Janvier. Illustrated..... 50
706. Iduna, and Other Stories. By G. A. Hibbard.. 50
705. Romain Kalbris. By Hector Malot. Translated by Mary J. Serrano..... 50
704. A Group of Noble Dames. By Thomas Hardy. Illustrated..... 75
703. Donald Ross of Heimra. By William Black.... 50

CENTS.

701. My Danish Sweetheart. By W. Clark Russell. Illustrated..... 60
702. St. Katherine's by the Tower. By Walter Besant. Illustrated..... 60
700. An Old Maid's Love. A Novel. By Maarten Maartens..... 45
699. April Hopes. A Novel. By W. D. Howells.... 75
698. Eric Brighteyes. A Novel. By H. Rider Haggard 25
697. The Philadelphian. A Novel. By Louis John Jennings, M.P..... 50
696. A Field of Tares. A Novel. By Clo. Graves 40
695. The Golden Goat. A Novel. By Paul Arène. Translated by Mary J. Safford. Illustrated... 50
694. Annie Kilburn. A Novel. By W. D. Howells.. 75
693. A Hazard of New Fortunes. A Novel. By W. D. Howells. Illustrated..... 1 00
692. The Missing Heiress. A Novel. By E. Glanville 40
691. The Great Taboo. A Novel. By Grant Allen.. 40
690. A Secret Mission. A Novel..... 40
689. Her Love and his Life. A Novel. By F. W. Robinson..... 30
688. Stand Fast, Craig-Royston! A Novel. By William Black. Illustrated..... 50
687. Marcia. A Novel. By W. E. Norris..... 40
686. The Wonderful Adventures of Phra the Phœnician. A Novel. By Edwin Lester Arnold. Illd. 50
685. The Snake's Pass. A Novel. By Bram Stoker. 40
684. The World's Desire. A Novel. By H. Rider Haggard and Andrew Lang..... 35
683. Kirsteen. A Novel. By Mrs. Oliphant..... 40
682. My Shipmate Louise: The Romance of a Wreck. By W. Clark Russell..... 50
681. Children of Gibeon. A Novel. By Walter Besant. 50
680. The Courting of Dinah Shadd, and other Stories. By Rudyard Kipling..... 30
679. The Entailed Hat. A Novel. By George Alfred Townsend ("Gath")..... 50
678. At an Old Chateau. A Novel. By Katharine S. Macquoid..... 35
677. Sowing the Wind. A Novel. By Mrs. E. Lynn Linton..... 25
676. Toxar. A Novel. By the Author of "Thoth," etc. 30
675. All Sorts and Conditions of Men. A Novel. By Walter Besant. Illustrated..... 50
674. Armorel of Lyonesse. A Novel. By Walter Besant. Illustrated..... 50
673. The Burnt Million. A Novel. By James Payn 25
672. The Shadow of a Dream. A Story. By W. D. Howells..... 50
671. Beatrice. A Novel. By H. Rider Haggard. Illd. 30
670. In Her Earliest Youth. A Novel. By Tasma.. 45
669. The Danvers Jewels, and Sir Charles Danvers. A Novel and its Sequel..... 40
668. Lady Baby. A Novel. By Dorothea Gerard.. 45
667. The Splendid Spur. A Novel. By Q..... 35
666. Lorna Doone. A Novel. By R. D. Blackmore. Illustrated..... 40
665. The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard. A Novel. By Anatole France. Translated by Lafcadio Hearn 50
664. Prince Fortunatus. A Novel. By William Black. Illustrated..... 50
663. Kit and Kitty. A Novel. By R. D. Blackmore. 35
662. An Ocean Tragedy. A Novel. By W. Clark Russell..... 50
661. A Hazard of New Fortunes. A Novel. By William Dean Howells. Illustrated..... 75

PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK.

☞ HARPER & BROTHERS *will send any of the above works by mail, postage prepaid, to any part of the United States, Canada, or Mexico, on receipt of the price.*

THE TRANSGRESSION OF TERENCE CLANCY

A Novel

BY

HAROLD VALLINGS

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
COPYRIGHT
DEC 1 1893
#2
CITY OF WASHING

NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
1893

PZ3
.V214T

THE TRANSGRESSION OF TERENCE CLANCY

CHAPTER I

Down by Chilling Water, where a great brown moor ends abruptly in a deep combe, and oak coppices feather down from the bald foreheads of the hills as though to embrace and shelter the laughing river, stands Little Chillington. It is a market town, with a high respect for itself, as being picturesque, well to do, and the centre of a large district; and also as possessing many historical associations. Its climate is said by strangers to be enervating, and admitted by local persons of exceptional candor to be a little damp towards the end of a wet winter. Yet the place has thriven pretty well during several centuries, and now boldly fronts the gaze of travellers by the down express trains, with its two churches, the ancient Gothic and the modern Romanesque, its old ivy-clad town-hall, and many desirable villas straggling up the steep hills from the clustered roofs of the lower town.

Upon this comely little place the June sun was blazing one afternoon not so very long ago, and very peaceful and slumberous it looked. Nothing but the leaping stream seemed to have life and motion. Not a soul was visible in the broad space by the town-hall, or even on Chillington bridge, the chosen lounging-place of a talkative town; while down on the emerald strip of meadow beyond the houses the lazy red cattle dozed and chewed undisturbed. The place, in its present aspect, seemed to justify the popular conception of a country townsman as a creature belonging rather to the vegetable than the animal kingdom—a nerveless, lifeless being, with slow sap creeping through his system in place of warm life-blood. Yet it is but a mock peace, a mirage of stagnation, that broods over the quietest of country towns. In the moon one reads of a great plain called "Mare Tranquillitatis," but in our own planet we find neither sea, nor plain,

nor any corner of absolute tranquillity—or, at least, one must go farther than Chillington to find so desirable a haven.

This afternoon, for instance, in the very first house of the town, as you approach it from below — the humble, ugly stuccoed little place that abuts upon the river-side meadows—there was going forward, as we shall presently hear, a conversation betraying discontent and other human weaknesses by no means consonant with a state of idyllic peace.

The house was at present occupied by one of Chillington's many doctors. The little place, embracing in its neighborhood many moorland and sub-moorland villages, supported quite a nosegay of medical men; and this was the youngest of the bunch, the last importation from London, who at present blushed unseen, his practice consisting mainly of unpaid work seasoned by hope. His name was John Syme, and he was just now engaged in lounging upon the sill of his open parlor window, alternately discoursing with a friend and gazing out at the lazy cattle in the meadow below.

The sunlit landscape offered little attraction to John Syme. He would sooner have looked out upon a street—a place with some life in it, with small boys jeering and fighting, and dogs getting lashed now and then by passing drivers. Nor did his general appearance suggest any leanings towards the idyllic or pastoral; indeed, he was simply a broad-backed, thick-lipped young man, with a rollicking, toss-pot air about him, though withal a waggishness that went far to redeem his coarseness. He was no model, you might have said at once, for an artist of the yearning school; yet Franz Hals would have liked him well enough, and perhaps have immortalized Jack Syme as a jolly drinker, pewter in hand and clay pipe in mouth.

The parlor outside which Jack's legs were dangling was a common little room, with scanty furniture of a vivid grass-green; and, in spite of the open window, was sufficiently malodorous, its whiskey fumes chastely blending with a powerful combination of smells wafted from the small surgery across the passage. As he drummed his heels against the wall of his mansion, he was smoking a short black pipe, and listening with his half-jocular, half-insolent grin to the talk of a friend who sat inside.

"Go on, Terence," he exclaimed, when the other voice ceased for a moment; "give us more of your blarney, for 'tis mighty refreshing. Your talk is like fizzing drink to me in this dull hole, where nothing ever happens. And I'm precious lucky to get your company for an hour now you're so mighty popular, ain't I, Terence?

Why, hang me, if you could be more sought after with a fine property and twenty thousand a year! You're making quite a splash in the neighborhood, ain't you, me boy? Thick with all the big county people; staying at Monks Damerel Hall with the great Sir Hamo himself; his son your intimate friend, loving you like a brother and shoving you into the arms of great ladies like Mrs. French-Chichester. Aha! you're exploiting the district, prospecting for a practice, as I know very well; making wonderful strides, too, with the ladies all in a flutter about your winning laugh and piquant brogue. And the picturesque figure you cut, with the bit o' land in old Ireland to talk about; the poor tenants who mustn't be squeezed; the poverty patiently borne in consequence! A mighty pretty figure, indeed, a sort of fairy-tale prince done into real flesh and blood, damme!"

There was a laugh from within, full of mirth and sunny good-temper; at once rich and soft, and far too fine for that vulgar little chamber.

"Yet I don't fear you, Terence, old boy. You're a love's-young-dream of a doctor—too bright, too fair to last; too gentle and pleasing and pretty for this cold, hard world."

Again the bright laugh, brimming over as with spring sunshine.

"There, there, Jack Syme, don't be for trying sarcasm. Fat beasts shouldn't gambol, but just chew on respectably, as you see them doing by the stream yonder."

Syme grinned again, then laughed boisterously.

"Terence, if I'm a fat beast, you're just the shallow stream he drinks from; bright and sparkling as the Chilling Water, also swift-changing, hard to catch hold of, and mighty shallow in some places! Ah, I know you, Terence. I know your little game. You're angling for a practice down here."

"A man must live, Jack."

"Aye, and a man of our sort must live well. We like refined society; we have a taste for captivating people and being made much of. We like horse-flesh, and know how to spend royally in several directions. Our practice must be good to support all this. And then there's one thing we don't like, and that's the most important factor in the situation—hard work."

"Ye're jealous, Jack Syme. By the powers, ye're a jealous ox!"

But Syme only knocked the ashes out of his pipe and laughed the louder; for certainly his friend possessed that kind of witchery which gives a man the privilege of free speech to all and sundry, and

makes it as difficult for him to give offence as for a pretty child or a fascinating woman. From the lips of Terence Clancy even an accusation seemed to tinkle like a compliment.

"Jealous?" Jack Syme continued. "Yes, jealous of your popularity and powers of fascination, confound you! but not professionally so, Terence. Jealous as a fellow-man and a fellow-fool, but not as a doctor. Because, mind you, I don't believe in your future success. You have pace of the lightning order, but no *stay*. That's where we Saxon tyrants beat you; we're stolid, hard, unsympathetic over here, but we're *dogged*. You have the brightness and blarney of the Emerald Isle, but no sticking-power, no grip. And I think there's a hole where your moral principle ought to be, though I'm not sure yet—"

"Thanks for the doubt. Go on, Jack; don't mind my feelings."

"Now, mark me," cried the other, striking fist on knee and leaning forward, "you're throwing a line on blank water. You'll never live by the profession. There's only one way of getting the easy life your nature craves for and *will have*, and that's well-gilt matrimony."

"I'm thinking you're right, Jack." There was a sudden almost feminine change of tone in Terence's voice. "I hate work—true for you there—and money won't come without it. Yet there's neither rest nor peace without cash, for the hair-shirt of a poor gentleman pricks wofully, and has to be worn night and day. What twist in the universe is it that makes human happiness dependent upon filthy lucre? Cash—pshaw! how I hate the word. Yet without this hateful cash life's just a treadmill, a jog-jog-jogging along a miserable rut of sordid care and mean endeavor, and bitter grudging of one's neighbor's luck. We poor men, I vow, are no better than ravening wolves, snapping and snarling for the bits that fall from rich men's tables. Look at me up at the Hall—living on the fat of the land, treated like a prince, turning an amiable smile upon every one, and all the time consumed with sneaking envy of Simon Secretan's big money-bags and broad acres. Faugh! my life up there is nothing but a day-long hypocrisy! And the glow and beauty of life are no more for us, Jack, than the material good things. Upon me conscience, I feel sometimes that, as a genteel pauper, I shouldn't look too long at a sunset sky! And as for romance, a poor devil like me can't afford it. I'll have to marry the first rich old hag that's fool enough to have me, Jack. I've been looking round a bit lately," he continued, with a quaint glance, half naïve, half sly;

"for, you see, I've been introduced to half the county, thanks to Simon Secretan, who is so anxious to push me into a practice. There's Mrs. French-Chichester, now. She seems to like me a bit, in spite of my carrots."

"Won't do, Terence; won't do at any price. She has taken you up lately, I know; but she'll drop you again like a red-hot coal in a month or two. Besides, you'd never stick to an old woman like that; you must have youth and beauty, as well as cash, to keep you straight, Master Terence."

"Find me the possessor of all three, Jack, and I'll try to put up with her."

"I have found her."

"You're joking?"

"On the contrary, I am about to put you up to a good thing, and at the same time satisfy a little private grudge of my own. There's more of spite than of jest about me, I assure you."

"Who is it, Jack? Who's your beauty-heiress? I smell romance; and any little jog to the nerves will be acceptable this weather."

"You haven't met the Tredethlyns yet?"

"No; they have been away ever since my arrival in these parts. But I believe they have just returned, and Secretan, who will be home again to-night is going to introduce me as soon as possible."

"Mr. Tredethlyn is uncommonly well off. I believe there'll be four or five thousand a year to divide between his two daughters."

"You're thinking of Miss Tredethlyn, then?"

"Certainly not. Miss Kate's a deal too proud to look at a country doctor, and would see through you in no time. I'm thinking of Miss Nell, the favorite—the dark-eyed, dainty little Nell."

"Don't you know that she's engaged to Simon Secretan?"

"Of course I do."

"Then what's the use of my thinking of her?"

"All the use in the world. She doesn't care for him, and is consequently all the more assailable than if perfectly free—or I don't know human nature."

"But he's my friend—the man who has loaded me with kindness. God's truth, man! do you think me such a sneak and a cur as to—to—" There was a loud bang as Clancy started to his feet and his chair fell backward.

Syme looked out for a moment over the broad meadows, and his teeth gleamed. Then Terence strode to the window, and for the first time became clearly visible.

He was striking looking, if only for his dazzling complexion, fair and bright as a young girl's, flushed now with a quick, generous wrath that became him well. A man of quick emotions, as any one could see at a glance; warm-hearted, responsive, sympathetic. There was something appealing in his face, too, especially about the delicate, sensitive mouth—a look almost of deprecation, as of one anxious for your good opinion; meaning well, yet wanting your help to carry out his meaning. Not a strictly handsome man, but rather what they used to call a "pretty fellow," with the rich red-brown hair that belonged so naturally to his fair skin and Irish eyes.

"Do you mean to say I'm a sneak?" he cried again, his eyes flashing.

"Oh, we're so deuced honorable, ain't we?" jeered Syme.

"Do you dare to say I'm not honorable?"

"There, be quiet, Pat—no need for hysterics yet. Just listen to reason now. I say again, the girl doesn't care for him. Secretan is a sort of Quixote, worshipping the ground she treads on, and so bores her, as a matter of course. It doesn't do to worship a woman, as he'll discover soon enough. I haven't a doubt but that she'll jilt him; and as you're too squeamish to step in, some one else will collar the stakes, that's all."

"I'll never do a shabby trick by old Simon; he has been a good friend to me."

"And a good enemy to me, Terence, so that I have a fine, round, full-grown spite against him. He has called me names, and hindered my achievement of a practice by his damned interference with other people's concerns, and one of these days I'll be even with him. 'Hard words break no bones,' they say; but they are apt to stop the daily bread of a general practitioner for all that—and hunger sharpens a man's spite, let me tell you."

"Well, don't abuse old Simon in my presence, for it hurts my feelings, Jack. Now I want to ask you about this trout-license question; for it seems that I ought to have a ticket, though, as the water is Secretan's, I have been fishing it for the last fortnight without one."

"Go to Ezekiel Doidge, at No. 50 High Street. He's secretary of the Angling Association, as of everything else, and will order you about to your heart's content."

"All right; and I must be making a start now, old chap." Clancy's face was cloudless again already. He stood at the open window, the afternoon sun blazing upon his sunny face. "Faith,

'tis a bright world, Jack Syme. Look at the children just free from school, racing along by the stream! Look at the dancing water, and the jolly red cattle, and summer haze brooding over the woods yonder, and the grand moors rolling away above them! Ah! I'd like to settle down here and never see a big town again."

In reply to this outburst Syme only grunted, pulling at his dirty clay pipe—

"I'd rather live in a slum with a decent income than—"

"Silence, you Goth! That's John Bull all over, with the shop and the till always pulling at his heartstrings. There, good-bye, Jack."

Jack Syme stood looking after his friend with puzzled frown.

"Can't make him out," he muttered; "don't half know him yet. He's a deuced taking fellow, fascinating as a pretty woman; but—but what? I don't know what. I think he'll have an eye on the Tredethlyn girls from this date. I think he'll fail with Kate, and then? Then will come the rub; we shall see whether Miss Nell's eyelashes, backed by two thousand a year and her other fascinations, will modify his sense of honor, cool the ardor of his conscience somewhat. Maybe not; yet, in Secretan's place, I wouldn't trust mine own familiar friend too absolutely. Clancy's sympathies are too quick, his emotions too facile and tender, his complexion too good. And he has the additional, perhaps crowning, attraction of poverty—a virtue of itself sufficient to stir the pulse of any romantic young woman. Yes, in Secretan's place, I certainly would have a plainer, or a richer, or a harder-hearted friend about me just now; say, for choice, some eligible landed proprietor, with bad teeth and gooseberry eyes; and, to make assurance doubly sure, one that was silent, diffident, humble-minded, and the possessor of every virtue under heaven!"

CHAPTER II

About a couple of miles outside the town of Chillington lay a compact little property called Moor Gates, in the heart of which was a small country mansion, the home of the Rev. Polwhele Tredethlyn and his two daughters.

Mr. Tredethlyn was a large, good-natured, picturesquely idle man, who, having once occupied the post of vicar to a country parish, containing quite five hundred souls, had ever since conceived of himself as an overworked man enjoying a well-earned repose; one who had some claim to a quiet haven after patiently undergoing his allotted quota of "the weariness, the fever, and the fret." Rumor declared that in his youth he had been an athlete, which made it the more advisable for him to exert himself gently in late middle age; perhaps, indeed, that youthful athleticism had produced, by way of natural reaction, the quietude which now distinguished the comfortable squire-parson. It is certain that he resented nothing more than the imputation of laziness, that the occasional passages of temper which took place between him and his elder daughter Kate resulted from a suspected disposition on her part to regard her father as a thought too idle, and a shade too much given to pathetic analysis of his dyspeptic symptoms. In truth, Mr. Tredethlyn was no idler. He would preach sometimes for the vicar, when pressed at bland moments, and always preached well; he would speak from the platform of the town-hall at public meetings without any pressing at all, almost; and a Chillington audience was never better pleased than when confronted by his genial countenance.

The quiet haven of Moor Gates had become a possibility when Mr. Tredethlyn took to himself a wife of ample means; nor had the moorland anchorage become less easeful when the wife in due course paid the debt of nature, leaving him with Kate—whose temper was occasionally a little trying—to remind him of herself, and so give spice to existence, and Nell to make much of, revere, and spoil him.

The little place suited both Kate and himself admirably, having its own little shady drive watched over by a miniature lodge on the

Monks Damerel road, its miniature park well timbered and secluded, its garden embraced on three sides by the grand desolation of the moor. It fitted in with his liking for peace and quiet, as well as, by its smallness, with a certain weakness he had for living well within his income; while Kate's chief vanity was ministered to by its air of refined propriety. Ostentation she cared nothing for, her pride finding outlets of a superior nature; but an environment at once dignified, decorous, and of a countified complexion she considered her natural due.

Kate's boudoir, for instance, was a model of what she considered correct—a small chamber full of comfort and ease and color—the newest art-color as a matter of course. Even the light of day was too common for admittance in its crude state, but had first to be tempered and refined by draperies of pallid green or ochreous yellow. Her father might do as he pleased with his study, but this boudoir was a sacred spot, the abode of half tones, fashionable magazines, and little feminine elegances. Sitting here, with the smooth lawn flowing up to the windows, and a distant view of the Chilling vale peeping through the laurels, Kate could realize to the full the breadth that separated her from the good folks of Chillington—supposing, that is, any artificial aid were necessary to a perception already sufficiently clear in this direction.

In this dainty little chamber Kate Tredethlyn happened to be standing about the time when she and her sister were being talked over in Jack Syme's odorous parlor. She was watching through the French windows for the pony-carriage to pass round from the stables; but her looks suggested that she had something more than the ponies and trap upon her mind. She was a tall, black-browed, handsome girl, and just at present finely posed from an artistic point of view, with a warm light from the southwest flowing round her; but the dark brows were drawn together and the eyes looked sullen. It was clear that Miss Tredethlyn was not in her best mood; and evidently the glimpses she occasionally caught of her father lounging about just out of tongue-shot, and looking remarkably cool and comfortable, had a far from soothing effect upon her. She would have been glad to get him within range for a moment, just to go into one or two household questions with him. And he was quite aware of her wish. Indeed, the large parson took a boyish delight in tantalizing Kate now and then, and thus revenging himself for past punishing moments. By choosing the laurelled path for his contemplative cigar just now, he was able to add the pleasure of retaliation

to that of smoking good tobacco; and, after a busy two hours spent in superintending a gardener from the depths of a cane chair, he was thoroughly in tune for a double enjoyment.

In point of fact, Kate's frame of mind was akin to that in which young men mutter bad words and reject feminine sympathy; for she had a task before her, and one none the less unpleasant from the consciousness that it ought to have been faced before, and must now be hustled through without due dignity and decorum. "I have had two whole months to do it in," she was reflecting, with vicious tugs at her left glove, "and now there's just one half-hour left. Nell, I'm going to have it out with you, and I would rather—rather go through a tea-party with every bore in the neighborhood in full talk."

Before that left glove was quite moulded on, and her mind half braced up to the necessary pitch, Kate's sister entered the room.

Nell looked charming, as a matter of course, in a crisp white summer gown and a big hat bent about into cunning curves and subtle hollows. She was built on a slighter, more delicate scale than her sister, but her coloring was as sumptuous as Kate's, her style gentler and more winning. Altogether, Nell Tredethlyn seemed a person to love and to swear by, rather than to quarrel with.

"Yet I must quarrel with her," mused Kate; "and I *will*—so there's an end of it." Aloud she said, sharply, "Late again, Nell, and a lover waiting! What will your tender conscience say, my dear, if you're five seconds late on the platform?"

"But we sha'n't be late, so my conscience can have a holiday."

"Holiday? It has just had two months' holiday, and so will be in fine working order, I fear."

This was Kate's first shot—a trial of the range, as it were. Nell had been separated from Simon Secretan, her betrothed, for just two months, and the remark was made in a pointed way which left no doubt as to Kate's meaning.

Nell looked astonished and pained. A peculiar constraint fell upon them both.

Kate stared hard at a photograph, not seeing it in the least, but preparing for another shot. Before she could fire it, however, the pony-carriage passed the window, and she promptly led the way across the hall, somewhat relieved at the thought of a practical task —for those smart black-browns of hers wanted some driving—as likely to steady her nerves.

As soon as they were seated the black-browns bounded off with a

jerk, and whirled them down the short drive in a trice. But Kate pulled them up, kicking and plunging, at the lodge gate, and said, hastily:

"By-the-bye, Nell, before I drive you to meet the train, I bargain to drop you at the station door. You must face Sir Galahad alone, for I'm in the wrong mood for him to-day. If this arrangement won't suit you, I'll jump out and you can take Charles."

"Very well; you can drop me at the door." Nell's curtness matched her sister's.

Then Kate gave both ponies a vicious lash, thus insuring some hard work for her hands and wrists, set her teeth, and prepared for a plunge.

"Nell, I've got something on my mind."

"What is it?"

"A sister — a most tiresome, quixotic, infatuated, extravagantly conscientious little creature called Nell."

"What is the matter with Nell?"

Both girls were somewhat flushed; both spoke and looked straight to the front, their glances declining to meet.

"I'll tell you what is the matter with you, Nell—a swelled conscience. You have a tendency that way. Your conscience takes up too much room in your general constitution, and has a bad habit of getting further swollen through inflammation."

"I don't understand you in the least."

"Nell, will you admit that you've been happier these last eight weeks, while we've been away, than during the whole past twelve months?"

"No; I'll admit nothing of the sort."

"You've betrayed all the outward symptoms of good spirits, at any rate; but perhaps that was only by way of mask? Perhaps your depression this morning was another mask? If so, this subtle hypocrisy is a new phase in you—very new to me, I assure you. Luckily, however, Sir Galahad's tolerably blind."

"You can abuse me if you like, Kate; but I won't stand a word against *him!*"

This spurt of anger from her sister gave Kate just the lift she needed, rousing her own temper to the pitch requisite for plain speaking.

"I'm just as conscious of his merits as you, Nell; he's a sort of Sir Galahad, Don Quixote, and Romney Leigh—all rolled into one; and it is just because he is so, and that your much the same thing,

though in petticoats, that I want to separate you. He worships you and you like him. It is an old story, and in most cases the arrangement suits admirably. In yours it never can. You are a brace of fanatics. You can't give him all he asks—which is your whole heart, soul, and mind—and so you're unhappy. What will be your state when you've married him, I should like to know; when your shortcomings stare you in the face every day and all day, instead of now and then? If he only were fanatical, well and good; but you are both tarred with the same brush. Now, listen, this is the beginning, middle, and end of the whole matter. You've got it in you to care for a man a great deal, yet have vainly tried for a whole year to care for him a little!"

Kate glanced round at her sister for a moment. There were angry tears starting from Nell's eyes.

"Yes, I could cry, too," she continued, sternly. "I could whimper like a child, if that were any good. A splendid match! Who could realize that more fully than a cynical respecter of persons like me? As Lady Secretan you might lead the county; you would roll in riches, your life would be all cushions and brocade. And yet, with all my appreciation of these things, with all my abominable worldliness, I want you to cry off! My sentiments are those of a Barnes Newcome, yet I want you to back out of the best match in the county! Now, doesn't it occur to you that there must be some powerful instinct at work thus to metamorphose a worldling into a sentimentalist? I'll go further; I'll admit that Simon is not only a good *parti*, but a fine fellow as well, which just serves to make matters worse, gives emphasis to your lukewarmness, despoils you of all excuse. Nell, you're simply heaping up wretchedness for him and for yourself!"

After this outpouring—a most unusual incident in the relations between the sisters—Kate turned off her course up a narrow by-lane, saying, grimly, "Neither of us is fit to be seen on the public highway just now; and there are just ten minutes left to have it out in, Nell."

"I tell you flatly that I will never give up Simon."

"Ah! I never hoped you would. I've done my duty, at any rate, and my mind's relieved."

"If I make a clean breast, tell you the whole truth once for all, will you promise me never to allude to this again?"

"My dear, will a prisoner promise to pick oakum no more if once set free?"

"Then I'll admit what I have never yet done to a human soul, and never will again—that my love for Simon *is* but lukewarm, and that I hate myself for it."

Katie raised her eyebrows mockingly, but said nothing.

"But, Kate, I do care for him, and my best hope is that in time I shall care for him as he deserves. It is impossible, impossible," cried Nell, her cheeks flaming, "that any girl should go on accepting the love of a man like that without learning to return it! My heart is set upon returning it; it is a point of honor with me, the thing I long for most in the world, that I pray for before all other things."

"Well, thank goodness I have none of your intensity to trouble me," said Kate, with a distracted sigh; "for, hampered with such a temperament as yours, I should have pined away and died at ten years old! I really don't know what's to be done with you! How would it be to send you out as a governess? I fancy twelve months of a situation in a genteel Low-Church family might rationalize you a bit. I wonder the doctors don't invent a drug for the cure of over-conscientiousness—the cancer that eats into the heart of our sex, and, what is worse still, makes us spoil the men so abominably!"

"I'm sorry I confessed at all, now!" cried Nell, angrily.

"Don't mention it, my dear; I shall manage to bear up against it pretty well—especially as I've known the whole story for months; moreover, it interests me to see how deep into lunacy a woman will wade, if given rope enough. Proceed, my dear child, I'm all ears."

"I've quite done, Kate."

"Finished already?—and I had composed myself to listen for half an hour. . . . I'm obliged to joke, little Nell, because I'm so vexed, do you see? And I should like to abuse Simon, because it's so aggravating to have to admire him. I do admire him, though I try not; but I wish he had never seen you. I wish he had given his heart to some good, wholesome, selfish creature like myself, who'd have put it in her pocket along with his last present, and have thought no more about either. However, though you're a tiresome child, I'll forgive you this time. Kiss me, little Nell. There, if I don't turn the ponies at once, I shall be getting sentimental."

Back again into the main road, then forward with a rush and a clatter. People who saw the pony-carriage coming, and thought to get a look at the handsome Miss Tredethlyns, hardly caught a glimpse for the dust and the speed as they whirled past. Round

the corner by the smithy rushed the black-browns, and down the steep hill into the yard at a pace calculated to astonish even those accustomed to Miss Tredethlyn's driving. The ponies smoked again as they were pulled up at the station door, just behind Sir Galahad's dog-cart.

CHAPTER III

In a few minutes' time the down express had arrived and departed, and Nell was strolling gently down the hill beside her tall lover. The latter having got rid of his servant and trap, and all his luggage, save a few articles that were now bulging out his pockets, they had before them two clear hours—for which Sir Galahad had stipulated in his last letter—before going back to prosaic existence and the society of rational persons.

There was no need for Nell to ask whither they were bound, for she was tolerably certain that Simon would follow a favorite route. He would first take her over the town bridge and down the river-bank by the vicarage garden, because he must needs have a look at the little town in order to feel thoroughly at home again; and afterwards into his own woods of Hollacomb, because they were redolent of sweet association with herself.

As they passed down the steep hill, with the little town spread out before them, the rush of Chilling Water greeted Secretan with the voice of an old friend. The Chilling vale, with its farmsteads and town, had in fact an appeal for him, not only from sentimental and æsthetic points of view, but as being a kind of bank in which he had invested a good deal of money, much of his heart, and most of the energy of his young manhood. For Simon Secretan was a practical philanthropist—at least, a philanthropist in fact, and a practical one in intention. No living person had given more thought and pains to the welfare of the little hive of human beings towards which he was bending his steps; and, as for the issue of his good endeavors, something might come of them some day or other; for already there might have been found in the place one or two persons capable of praising Mr. Secretan, and two or three more who only described him as a tiresome fanatic in deference to public opinion, or to please a neighbor.

At the bottom of the hill was Chillington bridge, fringed as usual with a double rank of summertide loungers, who happened to be looking rather brisk and expectant just now, since the arrival of the down express was quite the event of the day. At this hour an

interesting review was to be looked for—the march past of two hotel omnibuses, and perhaps a dozen passengers from London. Torpid old gaffers who had leaned over the parapet all day, allowing the flowing water to do their thinking for them, would perk up at this time and look almost like conversation, though seldom getting to the length of actual words.

Most of the loungers touched their hats as Nell and Secretan passed, and a gentle trickle of remarks followed upon their passage; nothing very eulogistic or the reverse, however, for Chillington bridge viewed things largely and calmly, with an aristocratic distaste for any display of enthusiasm. Moreover, Secretan was too eccentric, too earnestly bent upon the amelioration of his fellow-man, to be thought quite satisfactory; while too rich and powerful to be altogether found wanting.

Upon leaving the bridge the pair of lovers passed down the right bank of the stream, their path lying between the gleam and laughter of Chilling Water on the one side, and the gray old wall of the vicarage garden on the other.

Simon Secretan sauntered along with that easy, massive kind of lounge which comes natural to large men. His find head was thrown back a little, his face full of light and gladness. He had the look not only of a man with whom all things are well, but of one whose fancy will insist upon painting things even better than they are—the look of an enthusiast, a dreamer, an idealist; one of those who enjoy intensely and suffer keenly. A man incapable of half-measures or half-loves; to possess whom for a friend is to have a brother, a generous partisan blind to your faults; one whose good opinion you must needs live up to, knowing what a shock must ensue upon any discovery of your shortcomings. Most of all, too, a partisan of the feeble and unlucky, a "general gauntlet gatherer for the weak against the strong"; a man to love well, and satisfy if you can, or else to avoid altogether for fear of crashing falls.

Nell, too, felt happy and at ease as she walked beside her big lover. Her late excitement had naturally produced a reaction akin to contentment, for the baring of the heart is so often the heart's easing, the expression of an urgent desire its half fulfilment. A smooth sense of peace possessed her; already she cared more than she had imagined for Simon; the deeper love was coming, surely coming. She felt a repose in his presence that must needs be a precursor of that better state of things. The sense of exaltation and rest combined was strong upon her this evening; the large nature

of the man seemed a concrete tangible thing upon which she could lean. Nell's contentment was visible in her eyes, in the rich flush on her cheek; she would change places with no living person at this moment.

They emerged presently upon the open meadows below the town, and Simon halted for a good look at the little place before they moved on again. Then they sauntered along the meadow path, where are seats beside the stream, shadowed by tall elms, and nooks much sought after by young folks of the town, who like to round off a day's work with an evening's courting.

As they traversed this idyllic path, now in the green shade of the elms, now in the full dazzle of the sloping sun, Jack Syme looked from his parlor window and recognized the twain. He did so with a half-smile of contempt, corrected by a lurking gleam of sentimental appreciation. He was human, if not poetical, and the lovers made a comely picture; but his grudge, kept simmering by recent discussion, rather clouded his æsthetic perception.

"They are going down-stream, and will probably chance upon Terence," he muttered. "If so, I should like to be present at the introduction."

They soon passed out of sight, however, and Jack Syme fell to thinking of other things. Though imbittered by a lively grudge against Secretan, he was not a man of deep-seated malignity; and could he have foreseen how prodigious a crop of mischief would spring from the mere handful of seed he had sown in Clancy's mind this afternoon, he would have sunk his grudge under the deepest pool of Chilling Water rather than have given it so dangerous an airing.

Unconscious of being a target for any man's gaze, hostile or other, Simon passed on down the river, a sunlit heart within, and a world of sunlit haze around him, while the presence of his fair sweetheart dazzled his thoughts as the slant sun-rays his eyes.

Once fairly out of sight of the town, he helped her down the steep river-bank, and selected a moss-grown bowlder beside a still pool as her throne.

"Here you must rest awhile, my queen," he said, with a low luxurious laugh, "for certain odds and ends are burning holes in the pockets of your faithful subject, and crying out to be handled."

He laughed again as he emptied pocket after pocket upon a flat rock.

Nell flushed uneasily as she watched the growing heap of boxes

and miniature parcels, and the pouring out of their contents brought a shadow on her face.

Simon, it appeared, had been treasuring up every trifling want of hers. Not a casually mentioned wish, forgotten months ago by herself, had escaped him; he must have been listening to her very thoughts for this twelvemonth past.

His lavishness touched Nell nearly, but the evidence of his unresting thought for her smote upon her with a sense of pain. Every gift he had brought was like a witness against her, an exposition of the insignificance of her affection as compared with his. She felt too much crushed to thank him properly, and had too little natural hypocrisy to feign even so much pleasure as propriety demanded. But he noticed nothing amiss. A sensitive, thin-skinned man in all other relations, he was stone-blind to any shortcoming in this—with the blindness of intense natural loyalty aggravated by an imaginative temperament.

This blindness always deepened Nell's uneasiness. She felt caged and cramped by this intense belief in her, even to the point of hysterical longing to trumpet forth her unworthiness—to thrust it upon him with harsh words and looks.

"Let us move on again, Simon; I am rather restless to-day."

The remark was abrupt, the tone anything but kind, but he showed no surprise. "Very well, dear, let us stroll on. What do you say to following the other bank, and taking the woodland path towards Hollacomb?"

"But, Simon, there's no bridge nearer than—"

"A ready-made walking bridge on the spot, sweetheart!" He held out his arms. When she hung back, he laughed at her for nervousness. "Never fear, little Nell; I sha'n't drop you; you're a deal too precious."

In a moment his right arm was round her slender figure, and she found herself lifted off the ground—a featherweight in the strong man's hands.

He strode down to the shallow end of the pool with slow, lingering steps, then took an oblique course through the water, as though to lengthen the journey if possible. Half-way across he stopped, held hard by his passion, and whispered, huskily:

"I love you—I love you! I couldn't have passed another day without seeing you, my darling, my beloved!"

The bright Chilling laughed as he kissed her lips; the air seemed richer for the love-vows of a deep-hearted man, the carol of the lark

more thrilling. Then he uttered a dazed sigh as he waded out of the stream, and placed her gently upon her feet among the ferns. He had found the air of paradise intoxicating.

While he returned for the odds and ends left upon the other bank, Nell stood waist-deep among the brake fern, with pulses throbbing fiercely. All her innocent self-satisfaction had gone; she was humbled, heart-sick, and amazed. It seemed that all her worst fears about herself, which had given way beneath her own ardor when setting forth her wishes to Kate, and been subsequently dispersed by the glow and excitement of first meeting Simon, had surged back like a cowardly mob re-enforced.

For the first time, after a twelvemonth of continuous effort and passive endurance, she found herself in open mutiny against her lover, possessed by a sudden overwhelming repulsion.

"I hate him!" she muttered. "I've been a hypocrite to pretend the contrary; and he's too stupid to see through me! What right has a man to be so blind, so utterly infatuated? He ought to see my torture, he ought— O God, forgive me! What a mean, cold, selfish creature I am!"

Reaction had come again by the time Simon was back with her; the rebound of a generous nature was strong in her as she placed her arm in his, crying:

"Dear old Simon, you care too much for me!"

Yet very soon her depression returned. She blew hot and cold— had a change of mood for every turn in the path; pitied herself one moment, hated herself the next; now was amazed at her own long endurance of an intolerable yoke, now puzzled at her own fickleness and coldness. The struggle was the harder for its strangeness, this wavering, up-and-down mood being quite foreign to her usual habit of mind. Hitherto all had been smooth between them. Living within so short a distance, seeing him almost every day, she had grown thoroughly used to Simon; but now the habit of passive endurance had lapsed, and it seemed that her yoke would never sit easily again.

CHAPTER IV

MEANWHILE they drew near the border of Hollacomb Great Wood, into whose green embrace rushed the Chilling stream, with flash and flicker of foam by way of brief coquettish farewell to the sun. Nell drooped somewhat at the prospect of entering this woodland solitude; she would have liked better to walk with her lover along the most open and frequented stretch to be found on the Queen's highway.

Just inside the wood, however, a stroke of unexpected good-fortune befell her; she caught sight of two familiar figures at the turn of the path.

"Look! Surely those two are Mary Pethick and Mr. Doidge?" She spoke briskly, doubtless with a sense of relief at the coming interruption. The strain was removed; they had returned abruptly to the cheerful domain of King Commonplace.

"Simon, I think Mary is unhappy with that man; I do believe he beats her! He's such a black, sour-looking fellow, that I've always been afraid to speak to him."

"Oh, he's a good fellow," quoth Simon, in his large, careless way. "He hates me like poison, and always shows it, which is a good sign. There's no sneaking hypocrisy about Ezekiel Doidge; I like a man whose face reflects his heart in that way. Perhaps he's a bit savage and out of tune with the world because of Mary's coldness. His sweetheart doesn't care for him, they say."

"Do you blame her for not caring enough?"

"No, I blame him. He ought to have discovered that long ago; a man ought to have eyes in his head."

"Those two look as though they had been quarrelling, Simon!"

"Poor Ezekiel!"

"Poor Mary! I think. You don't seem to feel at all for her."

But they were now drawing too near the other couple for further discussion of their concerns.

Mary Pethick, who turned to greet the new-comers as soon as their steps became audible, was a young woman who monopolized a good deal of Chillington's gossip about this time. She was the daughter

and heiress of a retired tradesman; much spoiled by the ladies of the neighborhood on account of her musical talents, and by the young farmers and tradesmen on account of a certain prettiness and coquetry—a combination which, with the general run of men, is apt to avail more than real beauty. Indeed, many flirtations with all sorts of men, had earned for Mary the character of being a shallow, fickle creature, more likely to get into mischief than ever to prove good for much. But Nell Tredethlyn chose to think there was good stuff in the girl. True, Mary was a thought too fond of pleasure; but, was it surprising that, living as she did, in the seclusion of Hollacomb Farm, with only a deaf old father for company, the girl should be driven to extract every possible scrap of fun from the Chillington gatherings? And as for her inability to appreciate the wealthy miller and land-owner, Mr. Doidge, to whom she had probably engaged herself without enough consideration, why—some people might be inclined to sympathize with her on that score.

Mary received Miss Tredethlyn with a blush and an awkward bow, but Nell's frank hand went out to her immediately.

"I am so glad to see you, Mary. Have you been singing much lately? Tell me of any new songs you have."

Nell had felt especially drawn towards the girl lately, their mutual attraction doubtless arising from similarity of situation. They were, so to speak, fellow-sufferers; each of them too much beloved, each bearing the burden according to her light — though the lights were wide asunder in respect of power and quality.

There was something of comedy in their obvious relief now. Mary, who had previously been sulking for a full half-hour, prattled cheerfully, as soon as her first shyness wore off; Nell's returning brightness was like sun after gloom.

But these blind men perceived not the comedy. Doidge stood thrashing the lady-fern, and looking savagely from his sweetheart to Mr. Secretan, as though seeking for some sign between them.

He would gladly have picked a quarrel with Secretan, being jealous of him in more relations than one. For, before Secretan's arrival in these parts, Ezekiel Doidge had been a little king in Chillington. He had organized and domineered over every club and society of which the little place boasted, until his self-conceit became insupportable; and, the county gentlemen always holding aloof from the town and its affairs, his position appeared to be impregnable.

But no sooner did Simon Secretan come into the neighborhood

than he plunged eagerly, full of philanthropy and other dangerous fads, into the life and doings of Chillington.

First he handed over all the water on the Hollacomb estate, which he had inherited from his mother, to the Angling Association; thus making Doidge's gift of half a mile of stream seem trifling. Then he levelled a flat-topped spur of the moor with a view to making a cricket-ground for the townsfolk; then thrust his fingers into benefit societies, plans for the old-age insurance of laborers, and other matters having no concern with what people chose to consider his proper business. In short, this amateur philanthropist had in various ways contrived to mortally wound Doidge's self-love. And now that foolish miller, with the eager fatuity of an intense man nipped by jealousy, had come to look upon Mr. Secretan as a possible entangler of his sweetheart's affections.

It must be confessed that Mary always took pleasure in giving color to this delusion. To extol the handsome Mr. Secretan was a simple, sure—and, as she thought, perfectly harmless—way of punishing a lover who not seldom required the rod. She was able thus, moreover, to render innocuous the spurts of jealousy which would have been dangerous if directed against other people — against one man in particular, if the truth must be told. In brief, Mary was a coquettish woman, with her natural failings emphasized by a foolish engagement; and had lately been playing with edged tools, whose wounding capabilities she was yet to discover.

Miss Tredethlyn and Mary seemed loath to part this afternoon. The interest of their gossip showed no signs of abatement, for the sufficient reason that each vied with the other in eager putting forward of fresh topics. Judging by their present aspect, it seemed likely that nightfall would find them still talking.

Doidge regarded them with frowning impatience, his every third glance wandering rival-wards. But Simon Secretan, among whose fads the study of astronomy held a high place, was drawing a geometrical diagram on the sandy path, and seemed lost in calculation. Yet this might have been a mere cunning feint of abstraction, and poor Ezekiel, in his present condition, could suck jealousy out of a stone.

After a few minutes the mathematician emerged from his problem, and the talk ceased abruptly. Some one was evidently approaching, the sound of whose passage through the bushes was inaudible to Doidge on account of his proximity to the rush of the stream.

This some one was a fisherman, who came scrambling up from the rocky bed of the river, carolling at the top of his voice:

"O dolce Napoli
O suol beato,
Ove sorridere
Volle il creato."

The voice was a clear delicate tenor; its owner, Terence Clancy by name, was pouring his heart out in sheer exuberance of health and spirits. Terence was a cunning angler, and had been doing smart things with the Chilling trout. The hot, bright weather, so unfavorable to the fisherman, had been a challenge to him, and the pink-spotted beauties now lining his creel made a veritable triumph under the circumstances.

Upon catching sight of the group on the pathway he flushed warmly, coming to a dead stop.

"Who the devil are *you*, with your woman's skin and red hair?" muttered Ezekiel Doidge.

The question was answered immediately; for Secretan called out, with a laugh at his friend's embarrassment:

"Hallo, Terence! Well met, old fellow. I'm delighted to see you."

Then Clancy came forward, stamping the water from his dripping waders.

"You've often heard me speak of my friend Terence Clancy, Nell? Well, now at last I can introduce him to you in the flesh."

The simple ceremony would have pleased Jack Syme had he been present; for even though Terence was not quite at his best this afternoon, Nell quickly discovered him to be charming. His slight awkwardness seemed to accord so well with his modest looks and sentiments. He had a gentle, deprecating way with women, as though he were not half good enough for them; and his sunny smile had a curious attraction of its own. Nell thought she had never yet met a man quite so frank and pleasing. There was something fine, too; something quite removed from the commonplace about big Simon's friendship for this man. He stood with one hand on Terence's shoulder, speaking to him with the kind of protecting solicitude he might have shown towards a delicate woman. In a moment, as it seemed, they were all three talking together as though Clancy and Miss Tredethlyn had been old friends, Terence exhibiting his fish, and modestly describing how he had blundered over and lost the inevitable "biggest of the day."

Meanwhile Mary Pethick had stepped aside to pluck some ferns, and was stooping over them, red and pale by turns, the fronds shaking in the hand that held them.

Ezekiel, too much out of temper to join her, was watching the others. He presently called out rudely:

"Hi! you, sir; have you been fishing without a ticket?"

"Mr. Clancy is my friend," said Secretan, tranquilly, without troubling to look round.

"But this is Association water, though it runs through your land, and the Association, represented by myself, knows nothing of your private friends, Mr. Secretan."

Doidge advanced a few steps, quite cheered at the prospect of a controversy with his rival; but Terence hastily interposed, pulling a fishing ticket from his fly-book.

"Are you the secretary, Mr. Doidge? Well, I got this at your office this afternoon." He spoke with a disarming smile, which had a curious melting effect upon Doidge.

"All right, sir; no offence. But as I dismissed both keepers for idleness t'other day, I'm obliged to do the watching myself just now. Somehow I like this young fellow," he added to himself; "he's quite different from that damned stuck-up swell of a Secretan!"

One sharp, sudden, half-scared glance Clancy shot at the secretary as he turned away; but no one noticed it, unless it were Mary Pethick, who had looked up from her fern-gathering upon hearing Ezekiel's voice. Unfortunately—most unfortunately for every one of the five persons who had thus met together by chance—the quick-eyed jealousy which, if directed aright, might have availed much, was wasting itself in busy search for a mare's-nest. Doidge was missing an opportunity from pure misdirection of vision; straining his eyes to find a cloud in a speckless sky, and so disregarding the danger-signal held up in his path.

Soon afterwards Mary bade a rather hasty farewell to Miss Tredethlyn, and departed up-stream with her lover. Terence also remarked that he must be going, and marched off through the woods with a view to making a bee-line for Monks Damerel Hall.

CHAPTER V

The combe in which were situated the Hall and Hamlet of Monks Damerel was a long narrow valley trending in a westerly direction, its steep sides widening out at the mouth as if to embrace and make much of the westering sun. It was a lateral branch of the main Chilling vale; full of the mystery and seclusion of the moor, but having a dainty green beauty of its own unknown to the bare brown wilderness around it. A stream, which marks the axial line of every hollow in these parts, flashed through the oak-coppiced grounds of the old Hall, curving crisply a mile or so below round the half-dozen cottages of the hamlet. No main road crossed the quiet combe; but only the stony moorland track, connecting it with Chillington on the north, and then following the brook down to its junction with the river at Bickington bridge. It was a place for a scholar's thoughts to mellow in, a suitable haven of rest, as Sir Hamo Secretan thought, during the twilight time that follows upon a deep grief.

Sir Hamo came from a distant county, a district which he never intended to revisit; which, indeed, had become so hateful to him that he had sold his old family estate for half its value and departed, shaking the dust from his feet. For there, in one fell week, he had lost, through an epidemic of diphtheria which had ravaged the neighboring villages, his eldest son, two fair daughters, and his beloved wife.

Never a strong man, this blow had had the effect of confirming his natural weakness and idiosyncrasy. From being a bookish man with occasional bursts of action, he became a downright bookworm, and for some years was hardly ever seen outside his study. At length, however, he roused himself from his lethargy so far as to feel once more the promptings of land hunger; and as his remaining son, Simon, had inherited from Lady Secretan the manor of Hollacomb, near Chillington, Sir Hamo's eyes were turned in that direction. Thus, when the Monks Damerel property, which half surrounded Hollacomb, chanced to come into the market, it occurred to both father and son that the opportunity might be taken advantage of. True, the neighborhood was thick sown with memories of the wife

whom Sir Hamo had wooed and won by Chilling Water, yet might not these memories suffice to lend a delicate aroma of old happiness to the neighborhood?

A single visit to the Hall, the ancient home of an ancient race, settled the question. For here, surely, was the very place of refuge for which the old scholar's faded heart craved. Here was a gray old mansion, rising, massive and melancholy, from its balustraded terrace; in its front a wide forecourt and battlemented gate-house led up to by a broad avenue of sycamores with counter-avenues of beeches. And, best of all, this Old World picture was set in a most fitting frame—an old formal garden of the sixteenth century, with bowling alleys, and green galleries, and mighty hedges of clipped yew; and "knots" of rosemary, hyssop, and thyme. The preservation of this garden in its ancient state had always been a point of honor with the Bampfylde family; the vulgarizing touch of the modern landscape-gardener had been rigidly excluded; and so the old place was a complete, harmonious whole, a gem set by a delicate artist, well worthy of its place upon the bosom of nature.

After viewing the Hall which he had not seen for five-and-twenty years, and pacing through the length and breadth of that ancient garden, Sir Hamo drew a deep breath and vowed that a worn-out old fellow could find no better resting-place anywhere within this naughty world. No need for any further pressure from his son; his mind was already made up, and in a couple of months' time he and his son had taken possession of Monks Damerel.

Now, soon after their settlement, ironical fate decreed that old Sir Hamo, already a man of considerable wealth, and wanting even such moderate ambition as makes the salt of existence, should become the indifferent possessor of great riches.

It came about in this way: Upon the southward fringe of the property there was a presumably worthless old tin-mine, which had broken the purse, and afterwards the heart, of the last owner. Sir Hamo took no interest in this mine; he had purchased the land for the sake of sentiment, not minerals, and hardly knew whether or not he should continue working the ore. But fortune, with her usual aptitude for snubbing the devout worshipper and rewarding the callous passer-by, insisted upon providing him with an agent of exceptional ability, who first caused the mine to pay moderately, and presently discovered a new lode which not only multiplied the output by ten, but afterwards led the way to the opening up of other lodes still more valuable. Thus Sir Hamo, the eremitic scholar, became the

possessor of such prodigious wealth as neither he nor any one else quite knew the amount of.

The sensation produced in the neighborhood by these discoveries was tinged with a certain cynical melancholy. There was poor old Squire Bampfylde, in whose family the Hall had been for so many generations, dead of a broken heart; and hardly was he cold in his grave when the ungrateful soil of his forefathers opened its mouth to pour forth gold upon an indifferent stranger. And how much good would it do now? Would this old bookworm of a baronet keep a pack of hounds, fill his house with eligible bachelors, give great entertainments such as swell the tills of honest Chillington tradesmen, or in any other way study the well-being of his fellow-man?

In fact, Sir Hamo never made a single bid for popularity, but quickly settled into his musty groove; entertaining his county neighbors as seldom as decency permitted, and never giving Little Chillington a thought. Yet a course of consistent selfishness is not necessarily unpopular; being at least incompatible with neighborly interference—the one thing your genuine Briton does hate with depth and vehemence. At any rate, this neighborhood, upon which Sir Hamo never bestowed a thought, bore no particular grudge against him; and in truth was not a little proud of his immense wealth and fabulous erudition.

His son Simon, however, was right royally hated by a good many worthy people, chiefly by reason of his benevolent fads and whimseys. If Sir Hamo thought too little of Chillington, his son thought a deal too much. He seemed oppressed by his heirship to a noble fortune, to feel with Romney Leigh—

> "Who thought to take the world upon his back,
> To carry it o'er a chasm of social ill."

Simon had a dozen tiresome theories about decent housing of the poor, honest trading, and other unpalatable matters. He was welcome enough to build a free library and mechanics' institute out of his father's money; nor was there any particular harm in his fancy for giving up all the trouting water on his own estate of Hollacomb to the Angling Association; but when it came to building a row of new cottages by the river and letting them to idle fellows at a nominal rent—why, critics thought it high time for tongue-sharpening.

As patron of the living, too, Simon Secretan contrived to give much offence. For on the death of the old vicar, a good easy man

and true Chillingtonian—who did nothing, and died universally respected—he must needs put in Frank Nelson, an energetic young Cambridge man as exacting and tiresome as himself. Between the two Chillington grew harassed and irritable, like an over-drugged patient; and soon found itself deprived of that repose which it valued even more than mild lambing seasons and sunny harvests. Let this big pushing young gentleman stick to his observatory on the moor; let him stare himself blind with his telescopes if he pleased, and leave honest folk alone; in short, "Let un lave off harassing o' we, and us won't interfere wi' he!" Such were the universal sentiments of Chillington bar-parlors of a Saturday night.

Sir Hamo, as we have seen, concerned himself little about so much of the world as lay outside the walls of his study; yet for one person he would sacrifice even his beloved seclusion—to wit, his intended daughter-in-law. For Nell Tredethlyn he had a romantic affection—a species of adoration curious and picturesque as a study. Nell made a link between himself and his son—a link much needed, for this sentimental but narrow-hearted old gentleman had never quite forgiven Simon for surviving the beloved elder brother. "If only Hamo had been spared to me!" was the father's constant cry.

He even grudged Simon his taste for mathematics and natural science. When had dear Hamo ever been guilty of this vulgar modern craving for hard facts and dull figures? Ah! but Hamo was a chip of the old block; while Simon might have been any man's son.

By becoming engaged to Nell Tredethlyn, however, Simon made a definite step in his father's affections. As beautiful Nell's lover he acquired a new importance and interest; in a word, father and son at length possessed a fad in common, and true fanatics were they both in its pursuit.

On all occasions when Nell was expected as a guest, it was Sir Hamo's custom to perturb and exasperate his whole household for days beforehand. One of his whims was to have none but female servants about the place; another was a rooted disbelief in their capacities in any direction whatsoever. He distrusted women entirely, yet hated the race of flunkies too cordially to admit one single specimen under his roof. Thus it became necessary, whenever visitors were expected, to harry the house-keeper, and through her to induce a current of hysteria throughout the establishment. If the Tredethlyns were invited, Sir Hamo would have draughts on the brain, and seemed to have a settled belief in a universal conspiracy against the

life of Nell; who, having seldom known a day's illness, was often distressed by elaborate precautions and schemes tending to asphyxiation.

Now it chanced, about a week after Simon's return from town, that Terence Clancy had an opportunity of observing these phenomena peculiar to Monks Damerel Hall; for Nell, with her father and sister, was invited to dinner. From the moment of their acceptance he noticed that the atmosphere of the house became charged with electricity. Nor was he himself untouched by the prevailing epidemic of excitement.

In truth, Terence was tingling with anticipation of a kind too keen to be quite pleasurable. The last week had been to him a whirl of sensations, which acted upon him like repeated draughts of strong wine. He and Simon had half lived at Moor Gates; and of that best week in his life Terence felt this evening to be the crown and finish.

After this the curtain must fall upon the too-charming pastoral piece, and the stage-lights must be put out. No more play-acting for one whose life was to be a round of commonplace drudgery. His pleasant holiday must come to an end; he must settle down to real work; quit the fine old Hall, with its charming idleness and refinement, for some such dingy, evil-smelling little place as Jack Syme's surgery.

It was hard, bitterly hard. Had Nature endowed him with wit, and social talent, and keenest love for all things fine and beautiful, to enable him to fill the rôle of driven, harassed, hand-to-mouth general practitioner? Yet what chance had he in a world where cash means happiness? What hope of improvement in his lot? The Secretans meant well, but Simon's intention of working up a practice for his friend was simply of a piece with his other Utopian dreams.

During this visit to the Hall Terence had become better acquainted with this visionary from whose kind offices he had hoped so much. Why, Simon's schemes, he had found, were the standing jokes of the neighborhood; and this visit would prove no better than a disastrous waste of time, an aggravation of the drudgery to which he was returning so soon. Why had Simon asked him here at all, only to torture him with a glimpse of paradise? His friend had shown him a most cruel kindness in this matter. Would that he had never left town, had never seen Chillington, never entered the Hall, never been taken to Moor Gates—most of all, would that he had never met Nell Tredethlyn!

For Miss Nell seemed to be the culminating note in his indictment of Providence, the last straw of his burden. Terence was intensely impressionable. Nell's beauty and sweetness of manner had affected him almost magically in that short interview by the river, and again in the many subsequent meetings at her own home. He had tried hard to be attracted by Kate, but she only awed him, while Nell intoxicated him. He was conscious of an insane desire to see Nell again, jeer how he would at his own fatuity. She belonged to his friend—was bought with Simon's money, as he reflected bitterly. Was ever a wish denied to wealth or granted to poverty? Secretan had but to hold up his finger, and this girl with her glorious beauty was thrust into his arms. He had everything, *everything*—all the beauty and poetry of life, the glow, the freedom, the love— Well, for this one evening, for this last evening in paradise, he, Terence, was going to be happy. For this once he would sun himself at Nell's eyes. There could be no danger in that. Mayn't a man drink one draught of happiness before retiring to a desert? Nor could honor be called in question. Simon had, in fact, more than once expressed a desire for his betrothed and his friend to see a great deal of one another. He wished them to be real friends, had even stipulated that Terence should take Nell into dinner to-night. He was throwing them together of his own free will. Now, Terence could not afford to disoblige this powerful friend. Moreover, he felt himself as fit to be trusted upon the point of honor as any man living. Syme might have spared his sneers on this head. Terence would like Nell to be pleased with him, to feel as a friend towards him—no more. What critic could dare to find fault with so humble a desire? But at present there was no critic at hand either to praise or blame; for by capturing all hearts Terence had secured a chorus of eulogy from all around him; while as for his conscience, that was not always proof against his own eloquence, indeed often needed backing up by outside opinion. An unbiassed person, however, with a perfect knowledge of the workings of Terence's mind at this juncture, might have offered some useful platitudes by way of corrective to the arguments furnished by himself in his own favor.

CHAPTER VI

When contemplating an entertainment, on however small a scale, Sir Hamo was nearly always compelled to seek the assistance and support of his lady cousin, Mrs. French-Chichester. Without some such extraneous aid his battalion of petticoats used to get out of hand as well as hysterical.

To-day was to be no exception to the rule; and about two o'clock, when the fume and fret of harassed females had converted the Hall into a residence about as desirable as the interior of a volcano, the lady arrived in due course; whereupon peace and order ensued immediately, the almost tragic strain upon a score of nervous systems was relieved as if by magic.

Terence Clancy was the first to greet the welcome visitor.

"Well, Mr. Clancy," she said, shaking hands with him warmly—for during the last five or six weeks Mrs. French-Chichester had, for certain reasons of her own, "taken up" and befriended the young Irishman to their mutual satisfaction—"what is the condition of your atmosphere over here to-day? Much hysteria about? Any of the maids in fainting-fits? Well, cousin"—this to Sir Hamo, who had just drifted into the drawing-room, looking absent and irritable—"have you been enjoying yourself, harrying the womenkind? I think you're really fortunate in having a medical man in the house; some of those poor maids are sure to need treatment before the day's out."

"Your spirits are wonderful, Kathleen," said the old gentleman, with a sigh and a courteous bend of his silver head. "We are expecting Nell and some others to dinner, and so—"

"Yes, yes, I know; and the sky will fall unless everything's perfect, won't it?"

"And so I thought you would be so very good as to come over—"

"Of course. I'm only too glad to leave the dismal shades of Hollacomb for a few hours. Why don't you send Simon over to see me oftener?"

"Oh, Simon's no good!" retorted the old man, querulously. "He's always immersed in his star-gazing or his absurd philanthropic

schemes. He is away now on some mysterious errand in Chillington, getting astronomical drawings copied, or haply designs for a new infant-school, or home for decayed gentlewomen. I do assure you that he cares far more about determining the shape of Jupiter's fourth satellite, whether round or elongated, than considering any such trifle as the happiness of those about him. But you know his fads as well as I, Kathleen."

"Why, of course I do! Think of Nell's fate when she marries your son, cousin; she'll have to alternate the rôle of observatory assistant with that of matron to the last new hospital!"

Mrs. French-Chichester rang a merry peal of laughter. Her mirth brimmed with good-nature, but had a sediment of malice, as the quick-eared Terence had often noticed.

"Well, I hope," continued Sir Hamo, with a sigh and a furtive edging away towards one of the doors, "that as I have no son to help me, you will kindly take charge of everything, Kathleen; and I'm sure our always-kind Mr. Clancy will act as your aide-de-camp."

"Yes; I'll see to everything. You are free from this moment, cousin. You may retire at once to your library and your ancient manuscripts, and never give the household another thought. Mr. Clancy will help me, and we'll do all that's necessary, even to hermetically sealing the dining-room windows for the sake of poor delicate Nell."

Sir Hamo retired obediently. His step was listless and weary as he passed from the room, his grand head was bent low; the stoop of his shoulders seemed to have grown more marked even since his cousin's last visit. His noble presence and air of refined melancholy always made his withdrawal from a room seem to Terence like the closing of a sad poem.

For a few moments after the door closed they were silent; then Mrs. French-Chichester, as if drawn on by Terence's sympathetic looks, began to speak her thought aloud.

"Why doesn't he care more for Simon?" she muttered, reflectively.

Terence made no attempt to answer the question. He had failed as yet to quite comprehend this lady and her relations with Sir Hamo and Simon. She was at present Simon's tenant, having taken Hollacomb Manor for a term of years, and, as Terence had gathered from others, was the only one of his relatives of whom Sir Hamo had taken any account of late years.

But though he had not yet fathomed Mrs. French-Chichester, her very friendly treatment of himself had strongly biassed him in her

favor. Here was he, a penniless, struggling young doctor, picked out of the crowd and made much of by the most notable and popular great lady in the neighborhood. How could he do other than like and admire her? She seemed in her good-natured way to disparage Simon somewhat unnecessarily, especially in speaking of him to his father; but these small shafts might be no more than the aftermath of an old quarrel, of which Terence had heard rumors.

This quarrel had been brought about quite naturally. Mrs. French-Chichester was the widow of a distinguished general, and after the rapid life and movement of popular foreign stations, often found the stagnation of an English country district a weariness difficult to support. To correct this she liked playing Lady Bountiful to the neighborhood, especially to young people, more especially to good-looking young people, most of all to young people in love. She had a keen eye for the symptoms of a budding passion, and was perhaps a thought too fond of furthering the intrigues of young lovers.

It was in this connection that Simon, with his singular capacity for putting his foot into it, had come into collision with Cousin Kathleen.

There was a certain romantic affair, in the course of which a young squire of the neighborhood broke an engagement of long standing, his breach of faith being aided and abetted by the adroit mistress of Hollacomb Manor. This was a noble opportunity for Simon the gauntlet-gatherer, and he did not let it slip. He first exchanged some hard words with the squire, and, having thus generated sufficient excitement to attack even a lady relative, drove straight to Hollacomb, and gave Cousin Kathleen such a rating as might be forgiven and forgotten in the course of ten years or so—by an exceptionally generous person.

Terence was acquainted with this bare outline of an affair which had made some stir at the time, and sometimes wondered how Simon and his cousin had come to be on such good terms again. In spite of an occasional shaft or two, it seemed that the widow must possess a considerable fund of magnanimity.

He shot a puzzled glance at her now as she stood reflecting. She was a tall woman, with glossy black hair sprinkled with gray, a sallow complexion, and light-gray eyes, keen and alert. Though she seemed buried in thought, he caught a return glance directed at himself, and they both smiled to pass it off.

"You haven't answered my question yet," she said, "so I must

do so myself. Why is there so little accord between Sir Hamo and Simon? I believe it is because at bottom they are too much alike; because the same morbid vein runs through father and son. Both run to extremes; neither is in touch with ordinary human nature; neither knows anything of the world that goes on around him. Indeed, Simon's blind optimism is phenomenal in a man of his age."

"Perhaps you are right," Terence responded, musingly; "their likeness makes their discord. I was thinking only yesterday that Miss Nell Tredethlyn makes the only real link between Sir Hamo and his son."

"Ah! were you—were you thinking so?"

Her words came out quick and crisp as jets of steam. Terence looked more puzzled than before. She began at once to explain her eagerness.

"It interests me to find your thought running in the same groove as mine, Mr. Clancy—I had almost said 'Terence,' for I'm afraid that is what I call you behind your back."

It was a little intoxicating for Terence to have so important a personage almost coaxing him by her deprecating tone.

"It would be an honor and a pleasure to hear you call me 'Terence' to my face," he said, warmly.

"Well, why shouldn't I? I'm old enough to be your mother, and we've known each other nearly two months, haven't we, Terence?"

"Certainly. And during that time you have shown me such unvarying kindness as I cannot thank you for half enough."

"Tut, tut, my dear boy, you don't know what a pleasure it is to me to meet a clever young Irishman in this dull corner of Saxondom. Why, half the girls about here are in love with you already, I believe!"

Terence laughed musically; he was always modest enough to make it a pleasure to flatter him.

"But, to return to your friend Simon a moment, Terence—do you know, I am very uneasy about him? It is true that a breach with his betrothed might cause a quarrel with his father, but that would be healed in course of time. What I fear more is the step from betrothal to marriage, and the subsequent awakening—you understand me?"

He understood readily enough, and listened for more with a curious sense of trouble mixed with exultation.

"You see, Terence, I speak to you frankly and without affecta-

tion, as being, like myself, Simon's friend and well-wisher; and, further, as one possessed with far too much power of intuition to be blind to what passes before your eyes. You know as well as I that this engagement is a one-sided affair. Indeed, for my part, I'm heartily sorry for the young people. Nell doesn't care for him —never will; never could—and has found it out too late. Simon is perfectly blind to this, and will be until marriage opens his eyes, and then—*ruat cœlum!* The plain truth is that these amiable young innocents are bound on a journey which must land them in wretchedness. The girl is torturing herself now, but what will be her state when actually married to Simon? She'll hate him as well as herself; that will be the end of it. You know my nickname for him—'Lord Timon'! Well, he's Timon in the reckless, generous stage now — he'll be Simon the Cynic then! No half-measures with him, I know well; he'll plunge from his present extreme of blind happiness into that of pure desolation."

Terence felt that there was much truth in all this—and tried to feel that there was no malice under it. Mrs. French-Chichester seemed to be speaking as a kindly woman impelled to unusual confidence by sheer warmth of feeling; but—but, as she said, Terence had a keen faculty of intuition. She concluded in a lighter, somewhat apologetic tone:

"However, I ought not to take advantage of your friendship for Simon by troubling you with these matters which are disturbing me. Let us now ring for Mrs. Henley, the house-keeper, and set to work in earnest."

Mrs. French-Chichester and her aide-de-camp then entered upon their duties with zest, for the bustle and movement of such preparations were grateful to the excited mood into which both had fallen. The lively widow took a special pride in her capacity for manipulating the female flock at the Hall, and getting them to work harmoniously; and her velvety smoothing of Mrs. Henley, while denuding that jealous woman of all her powers and privileges, was a miracle of adroitness. Even in utilizing Terence she displayed talent, assigning to him the task of cozening the head-gardener. A wealth of flowers flowed in upon her in consequence; for to the frank boldness of a man Terence added the pleasing cajolery of a woman. It was the same with gardeners, stablemen, maids; even with the crabbed Mrs. Henley herself — neither man nor woman could resist Terence, since he attacked each with arts learned from the other.

The hours flew. In no time, as it seemed, Terence found himself in the drawing-room with Mrs. French-Chichester, listening for the rumble of arriving wheels. Sir Hamo had been extracted from his library but a few minutes ago. Simon had not yet arrived from his mysterious visit to the town. They had a pleasant little ten minutes together.

Terence was full of open admiration for his companion, and she really deserved it. Her somewhat sallow complexion looked well by gaslight, her pale eyes gleamed brightly; her figure was full of stately grace; her toilet such a masterpiece as long purse, long pains, and talent amounting almost to genius, can produce when in combination. She looked what she aspired to be—the queen of the neighborhood.

And to a man of his age there was a peculiar fascination about the protecting, even flattering, attitude she assumed towards him. She tapped him with her fan, encouraged his admiration, fastened in his flower coquettishly, and by a dozen little attentions led him to understand that he was a handsome young fellow, well deserving a high place in her regard. Even his genuine modesty was not proof against such bewildering treatment. The clever widow fairly turned his head.

She sprinkled the air all round him with delicate flattery, which he drank in together with the flower-scents of the room; and her radiant costume flattered his eye as her words his ear. Without any apparent leading of Terence she tuned his mind to the pitch of exaltation in which the touch of every new thought strikes out a melody, and mere fact is lost in the harmonious clang of many hopes. The mere prose of life was melting into verse, and as the verse flowed she wedded it to music. He seemed, as it were, to have climbed the social ladder at a single stride. Ambitions which a week ago had been ridiculous were now becoming rational and even praiseworthy. And she was careful not to carry him too far or to let any wish of her own stand forth to mar the impression she had created; she seemed merely a good-natured friend, anxious to encourage him and make him conscious of his gifts.

After this exciting process she steadied him a little by a laughing description of some of the people he was about to meet.

"You know Mr. Nelson, the vicar, I think? He has a touch of good old Simon's lunacy, but fortunately is not rich enough to carry it to the same lengths. His wife has a nursery full of children—with ideas to correspond. We sha'n't get much fun out of *them*.

Mr. Tredethlyn is worth meeting—when not dyspeptic. Of course you've met him, though, as well as the girls? As for the latter, they at least will provide us with a spice of comedy. On the one side, we shall have Nell trying to care for Simon; on the other, Kate trying *not* to care for his friend Julius Rush. Captain Rush is a dragoon guardsman, and heir to a fine property called Bickington Park. But unfortunately the place was purchased with the base coin of trade. Old Mr. Rush, now Squire Rush of Bickington, occupied many profitable years in measuring the waists and legs of noble lords and others in a respectable shop at the West End. And you know Kate's weakness. Had the tailor's son possessed the wealth of a Midas and the intellect of a Newton, she must have snubbed him. She does it well, too. You'll see to-night how she can make him writhe; for he's a proud man, and admires her against his will. I fancy she has a little weakness that way herself, from the pains she takes to be rude to him. Odd thing, isn't it, that one sister should be cooing at the man she doesn't care for, while the other is, so to say, clawing the man she does? Ah, that's the sound of wheels, Terence—the curtain's about to rise!"

The different groups which made up the small party entered soon afterwards in quick succession, and Terence found himself greeted cordially by almost every one.

The good-natured, unctuous Mr. Tredethlyn drew near to him with especial friendliness.

"You see, we none of us look upon you as a stranger, Mr. Clancy, having heard so much about you from your friend and eulogizer, Simon. We are all hoping that you will really settle down in the neighborhood. I assure you Chillington is quite prepared to receive you with open arms," and so on, and so on.

Why did every soul he met thus insist upon puffing and praising him? By what gift or faculty did he thus attract every one who crossed his path? He made no special effort to please; hearts seemed to be won by a civil remark or a brace of conventional smiles. But whatsoever the gift might be it would be wasted, he presumed; for the vice of his poverty, once clearly exposed, must soon kill his popularity.

Terence's glance, straying past the bulky form of Mr. Tredethlyn, presently hit upon the corner where Simon, who had but just entered, was talking to Nell. She seemed *distraite.* Her long lashes were lowered; or was this a deferential meekness induced by the presence of her lord and master? She looked more ravishing than ever

to-night, Terence thought, with her dark face set off by white and gold draperies, her little hands toying with her big fan. And tall Simon stood worshipping her—doubtless gloating over his property. They would be married ere long, Terence supposed. He felt a stirring of something like hatred for this man upon whom Fortune so lavished her gifts.

The simple announcement of dinner roused Terence like a bugle-call to action; the best moment of the twenty-four hours was at hand.

When the party paired off Nell was to belong to him, to be his very own during that brief passage to the dining-room. Ah, the moment had come at last! The rustle of dresses and murmur of talk was ebbing from the room, Nell's small hand was upon his arm, her flower-face looking up to him.

"You seem depressed this evening?" she whispered, kindly, as they crossed the polished hall.

"I wonder was Adam cheerful when the time came for him to leave Paradise?" he answered, recklessly.

Her innocence gave a keen edge to his temptation. She was country-bred, unsophisticated, without the usual quick perception of her sex in one direction. Her unconsciousness of his admiration made it so dangerously safe. He felt that he could look and talk as he pleased, that no thought of anything beyond simple friendship would come into her mind.

In truth, all Terence's surroundings combined to inflame him to-night. Peasant-born, and reared in narrow circumstances, he was yet intensely alive to æsthetic impressions. The mellow old dining-room, with its oak panelling and fine pictures, appealed to him keenly; those delicate Claudes and sensuous Correggios, collected by Sir Hamo and his forefathers, spoke to Clancy as to no one else in the room. None of these people, his social superiors, had his innate perception of grand art; almost all of them would have preferred a flashy modern landscape or sickly sweet piece of homely *genre*, or haply some drama of puppy-dogs and milk-cans. The very flowers on the table had a special appeal for him; the silks and satins, the bright eyes and white shoulders around him, the refined, melancholy features of Sir Hamo as he sat at the head of his guests, made up what was to Terence a picture at once rare and beautiful. And beside him, her face full of sympathy and readiness to be pleased, sat Nell Tredethlyn.

Never had Terence been so witty and brilliant as this evening. A far duller man might have made a success if borne along, as he now

was, by such a tide of favoring conditions. His courage had been stirred, his self-esteem set a-glowing, by a skilled hand; cordial greetings had made his nerves tingle pleasantly; he was thoroughly conscious of being among friends, yet sufficiently a stranger to retain the first gloss of interest and piquant newness which familiarity so quickly makes rusty; and the sharpest of all spurs to effort was pricking him—the desire to warm one special heart and dazzle one special pair of eyes.

Mrs. French-Chichester fell into his mood delightfully; even when she never spoke he was conscious that she was supporting him. With a difficult or unappreciative audience Terence would have been dull and silent, but among these kind friends his talk flowed and gleamed like the Chilling stream. He brimmed over with Irish anecdote and drollery, while Simon, delighted with his friend's success, kept urging him to fresh efforts. Mrs. French-Chichester was radiant. Captain Rush, excited perhaps by Kate's presence, contributed a wit of his own—dry, veined with sarcasm, making a useful corrective to Clancy's wealth of words. Not for many a long day had the quiet Hall entertained so mirthful a party. Even Sir Hamo's habitual depression melted under the warmth of their genial mood; and as for that lover of all good things—whether in the nature of food, wine, or gossip — Mr. Tredethlyn, his large, comely face was ruddy and shining with laughter. "We can't let the man go at any price," he said to his friend the vicar; "he's better than any liver tonic. Stay in Chillington he shall, if I have to buy him a practice myself!"

Terence laid himself out to be charming, and scored at every sentence, making every point in his natural equipment tell. Yet he never seemed to monopolize the conversation, but rather, by some magic of tact and sympathy, made every one else seem as witty and eloquent as himself.

Mrs. French-Chichester watched this triumphal progress with a serene sense of having at length secured a protégé really worthy of her artistic manipulation. Almost anything might be made of this man. Assisted by a clever woman, he had a career before him; handled delicately by a kind friend, there was a vista of possibilities stretching along his path, and at the end of it, perhaps, a harvest of satisfaction for the kind friend to reap. Truly he was a more important person in her sight than he had yet imagined.

"Well," cried the lively widow, throwing herself upon a sofa as soon as the ladies had filed into the drawing-room, "what do you

all think of my 'pretty boy'? Isn't he superb? Haven't I often been crying out for an Irishman to put a little life into us vegetables down here? Really, I'm ashamed at the amount of laughter I have perpetrated this evening! Wait till he has secured a practice, and you'll see what a clean sweep he'll make of all our medical fogys down here. He'll ruin them, send them all to the workhouse in a body; your stolid Saxon will never stand against him! He's just charming now, isn't he, Nell dear?"

"He is, indeed; so full of spirit and life, and yet so gentle and modest, and— But I never can describe people."

"Kate, what have you to say about him?"

"He's pleasing, no doubt; but I'm always a cynic, you know."

"Tut, child; don't be talking of cynicism at three-and-twenty! What have you to say against my 'pretty boy'!"

"Nothing."

But Kate spoke with just sufficient lukewarmness to evoke fresh enthusiasm from the rest of the party. Terence's ears should have burned indeed under the chorus of eulogy poured forth in the drawing-room.

"I know they'll keep him there for ever so long," concluded Mrs. French-Chichester, "for, to speak candidly, men are just walking bundles of selfishness. Remember that when you think of matrimony, by-the-bye. Kate, they're all alike, so choose the richest! I know precisely what is going on in the dining-room at this moment: they're pouring out the wine and making *him* pour out the wit, and they won't give us a look at him again this hour. Suppose we all stroll out on the terrace—we might catch a little fun through the open window? Or perhaps some of you pretty girls might tempt the men away from their wine? Nell, dear, you put on a shawl, or we shall have Simon and his father rushing out upon us, each with an ulster! Or, stay! Go without one, and so we may perhaps break up the party. I'll stand the blame."

The manœuvre was completely successful. The group of ladies, relieved against the mist-laden vale and bathed in the warm light of the after-glow, made a picture not to be resisted. Peering through the window, Clancy espied them, and stopped in the middle of a sentence; Captain Rush, following the other's glance, pulled moodily at his mustache, and had nothing more to say. Sir Hamo, catching sight of Nell's bare shoulders, walked to the window to upbraid her imprudence. In three minutes the dining-room was empty.

The ladies moved innocently away without looking behind them; the men streamed out upon the terrace, the dragoon guardsman bringing up the rear. He was engaged in the struggle between pride and inclination that Kate's presence always induced. Why should he go near a woman who despised him? Contempt was the one thing in the world that he found insupportable, and none but Miss Tredethlyn had the temerity to curve a contumelious lip at him. As a Cambridge man, a sportsman, a good fellow (also a rich fellow), he had been well enough received by his regiment. He had distinguished himself in one of our small wars, and more—far more—was a polo-player of some note. How dared she despise him?

The square-jawed, somewhat grim soldier, always showed a stoical front, but the fact remained that Kate could torture him almost at will—and her will was generally equal to the task. His inferior origin was a sore which no success in life could ever quite heal, but the woman he admired was apt to make it burn and sting as no one else could do. Certain darts of hers were sticking in the place now as he came sauntering carelessly behind the other black coats, revolving how best to show his indifference. Downright avoidance seemed the simplest plan, and was also the hardest.

Unfortunately, too, Kate happened to be detached from the others, and to glance at him just as his resolution was formed. Perhaps she was in a softened mood, perhaps content with the snubbing she had already administered this evening; at any rate, the glance was delivered. He deviated a little from his course, so as to avoid her; but—but the twilight was bewitching, and Kate looked passing handsome in this light. Not so beautiful as Nell; her face a shade too long and narrow, her bearing many shades too proud. But, unfortunately, this dragoon had a weakness for tall, haughty women. He might give her one chance, say just three words, for example; and if she chose to treat him as the gravel under her feet, this should be his last attempt at civility; she should be ignored henceforth.

Captain Rush spoke the words, and was received with a smile—not an effusive one, but sufficient, so few and far between were his encouragements, to upset good resolutions in a trice.

They fell in behind the others, but their conversation dragged. It is difficult to be agreeable when clogged by anxious pride; and neither would so far relax as to make a genuine effort. Presently they halted at the top of some steps, whence a path led down through the shrubberies to the brook-side.

"What would I give to take her down there?" thought the soldier.

"Why doesn't he offer to take me?" thought Kate.

"Why don't you two go and have a look at the stream? I shall be sending Nell and Clancy after you directly."

It was the voice of Simon, the ever-ready helper of lame dogs over stiles.

The pair stepped down immediately, without a word, each vowing secretly that Simon was a good friend.

Very different was Clancy's plan of attack from the dragoon's. He felt reckless of appearances. It was his last evening, his last chance; and in a forlorn hope audacity is the only policy. He walked bodly up to Nell, and easily succeeded in detaching her from the others; indeed, Nell fell in readily enough with his plans, for the simple reason that she had a message from Simon to deliver, and might not have so good an opportunity for some time.

Before they had gone many yards Simon joined them.

"I won't give her up," muttered Terence. "I won't throw away my last chance to please any man living!"

"Terence, old boy, suppose you take charge of Miss Tredethlyn for a quarter of an hour? I am going to have a weed with the vicar."

"The man's nothing short of a fool," thought Terence; "but, if he will thrust me into temptation, let him take the consequences!"

Nell seemed pleased with the arrangement, exchanging, however, a significant glance with her betrothed, which puzzled Terence not a little, and damped his ardor somewhat.

"Shall we stroll down to the brook, Mr. Clancy?" she asked, with her ravishing smile; and straightway glamour and hope wrapped themselves round him again.

For Terence it was an enchanted garden through which they walked. For once in his life he was not out in the cold, for once circumstances were kind to him, allowing the melody of hope to rise and swell unchecked. He knew that his best chance lay in Nell's sheer inability to suspect; that his cue was to arouse her sympathy, appeal to her kindly feeling. With her, pity would be more nearly akin to love than with most people.

He began to speak to her of himself, of his poverty and struggles, and very sweet was the sympathy with which she listened. It was impossible to avoid deceiving her a little. That was not his fault, the deceit being a part of man's natural tendency towards the picturesque fallacy. Without intentional misleading on Terence's

part, people had rushed to a picturesque conclusion concerning him — to wit, that he was a poor gentleman, a small landed proprietor, compelled to undertake a professional career by his unwillingness to oppress poor tenants. He had never proclaimed this in so many words; it had been evolved from the neighborhood's inner consciousness — at least, in a large degree. In plain truth, Terence Clancy was the son of a small farmer in County Cork, whose only tenants were a few cottiers; and who perhaps received about twenty pounds a year from this source—when rents happened to be paid. As the clever one of the family, Terence had, by dint of much scraping and the assistance of friends, been sent to an English public school, and being now fairly launched on the world, was expected to make his fortune, and become the main-stay of half a dozen little brothers and sisters.

Upon reaching the brook-side, they rambled along it until close upon the bridge over which ran the lane to Monks Damerel village. There they halted upon a patch of greensward, and Nell turned to him with a sparkle of kindly triumph in her eyes—

"I ought to feel mean for letting you run on so, Mr. Clancy; but I couldn't resist the temptation of giving you a great surprise. I have a curious piece of news for you, in the shape of a message from Simon. You mustn't disappoint him! Oh, you *mustn't!* He would feel it so deeply if you refused. You know how anxious he has been to have you settled near him? He has been working to that end without saying a word to any one but me, and now has actually achieved it this very afternoon; if you will but consent to let him do you that much service. You *must* consent, for he has handed over to me the privilege of persuading you, and I've promised to succeed. Will you say 'Yes' before I tell you?"

"I shall find it hard enough to say 'No' to anything you ask."

"I'm not so sure about that; men are so dreadfully proud — at least, I know Simon is, though he scoffs at the notion. Well, this secret of his is—he didn't half like telling it you himself, and now I'm quite nervous about it — the fact is, Simon has been talking business with old Dr. Rose lately, and this evening they came to— to some arrangement, by which Dr. Rose is to retire, and you, Mr. Clancy, are to take his practice. Oh, pray don't refuse, or I shall put it down to my clumsiness and want of delicacy!"

Terence almost gasped with astonishment. Dr. Rose's was *the* practice of the neighborhood, worth more than Terence had hoped

to be earning after twenty years' work. In a flash he saw that, were this news true, his fortune was made. With his personality and gift of pleasing he could, having a fine ready-built practice to work upon, rise to almost any height of success. But this business was worth a large sum of money; could Simon be so preposterously generous even for a friend? No need to ask the question; it answered itself. Very rightly had his cousin called him "Timon."

"Methinks I could deal kingdoms to my friends
And ne'er be weary."

So said Timon of Athens, and Timon of Chillington might have claimed the sentiment as his own. His friend's romantic generosity brought quick responsive throbs from Terence. How mean and shabby and poor he felt; he who had but now been trying to undo the happiness of his benefactor. What mean pitiful sophistry had he been guilty of up to this moment! After this he felt he would rather die than injure Simon. Never another thought of Nell would he harbor beyond what a brother might. It was a marvel, this gift of Simon's; an act of unparalleled generosity. Simon had been borrowing money lately, as Terence knew, his father being tired of supplying the wherewithal to carry out his philanthropic schemes. He had been borrowing the money which was to give his friend this start in life. Terence rushed to the conclusion, and knew it to be a true one.

As he stood looking amazedly at Nell, his face on fire, his thoughts in a whirl, there was a sound of wheels, and a rough pony-cart came down the lane from Monks Damerel. Its driver was John Syme, who had been visiting a farmer's wife on the moor a mile or two beyond the village. There was light enough for him to see the pair by the stream, even to catch Clancy's eye as he passed. Syme was whirled quickly by, but his look of exulting comprehension remained with Terence.

"You're wrong, though, Jack Syme, quite wrong," he muttered, turning to Nell as she began to speak again.

"I do hope you're not going to refuse," she said, uneasily. "The disappointment would be so painful to Simon."

Terence smiled at the comical attitude of these Arcadians. Refuse? Why, in the name of common-sense, should he refuse? He would not even affect hesitation. All that was honest and generous in him responded to this proposed gift of Simon's, and he let her

see it. He called him a benefactor, poured out words that came hot from his heart, and brought tears to Nell's tender eyes.

"I must see the old fellow alone to-night," he concluded, "though I can never tell him half that I feel. Speak to him first, I beseech you. Tell him that I have it in me to cry like a woman—that I shall do so if I attempt to say much."

"Yes, I'll tell him," said Nell, with a glad laugh.

"Will ye shake hands with me now?" he cried, in his eager boyish way; "will ye shake hands and conclude the matter so? There, 'tis a bargain."

Terence laughed, too, though his eyes were moist.

"Ah, how like Simon is the whole transaction!"

Her praise gave Terence a pang of jealousy, but he stifled it manfully.

"None of that, Terence Clancy!" quoth he to himself; "if ye don't play fair and stand by old Simon now, I'll never trust ye again, you scamp!"

As Nell and Clancy walked back along the brook-side, still glowing with the wonderful secret, they were met by Captain Rush and Miss Tredethlyn.

Rush did not appear to have advanced his suit much this evening. He wore the caustic smile of one who has just discharged a sarcasm and seen it hit the mark. He looked a trifle reckless, too, as though he had been fighting battles with his tall companion to the detriment of his own interests, as was actually the case. In fact, any intercourse between these two was apt to end in combat, in the clash of her arrogance with his pride.

Kate, with a view, perhaps, to support herself against any weak leaning towards this son of a tailor, would always contrive to throw down an apple of discord, in the shape of some question of exclusiveness or caste prejudice, and so to sting him into retorting with the sentiments of a socialist agitator. Thus their dialogue usually bristled with sarcasm and polite bitterness, and the foolish pair usually parted in bad temper and mutual enmity.

This time, however, circumstances gave them an opportunity of unwonted accord, for when they came suddenly upon Nell and Clancy, looking excited and happy, evidently on the best of terms, a look of uneasiness was exchanged between Captain Rush and his companion. Without a word they joined themselves on to the other pair, Kate quietly taking possession of Clancy, Rush opening an immediate conversation with Nell regarding the beau-

ty of the evening. And so they all four returned to the terrace together.

When Nell whispered the brief tale of her success, Simon exulted as boyishly as Terence himself. He had not the least conception that he had just accomplished a rather clever stroke, and cried "Check!" to two dangerous enemies.

CHAPTER VII

THE next few weeks were a time of pause for Terence and his group of friends—a quiet period during which nothing seemed to happen, though the seeds of future events may have been in process of sowing by unwitting hands.

Terence himself was for the most part occupied in driving about the neighborhood with Dr. Rose, learning the weaknesses and weak sides of the various county families whose ailments made the bulk of the practice. It soon became evident that the well-lined mantle of the old doctor would descend upon Terence intact and sit without a crease. He took in the good-will of the business, as it were, at every pore, and made a new group of friends every time he stepped down from Dr. Rose's dog-cart. It was a unique experience for Terence—this feeling that his future was assured, that grinding anxiety was no more, the hair-shirt of poverty stripped off; that in a week or two he would be a man of substance, possessing a decent house, and a stable with a couple of horses. In truth, Simon was not one to do anything by halves, least of all any extravagance on behalf of a friend; the agreement to be signed shortly would put Terence in possession not only of a flourishing business, but the well-furnished house, large garden, and other appurtenances of the old doctor's establishment on the hill. For Dr. Rose was himself about to remove from the town, to emerge from the pupal stage of country practitioner into the full-winged *imago*, a country-gentleman.

A quiet period and, at least for the first week or two, a cheery one for that sunny fellow, Terence Clancy. He blossomed afresh under the warm influence of prosperity, was so full of brightness and life as to be more sought after than ever. Take Mr. Tredethlyn, for instance. The large, good-natured parson suffered a good deal from an ailment seldom called by its right name—idleness. Good feeding and old port were insufficiently corrected by a drive into Chillington once a day and a couple of hours spent at the little club afterwards. His liver demanded something more than carriage-exercise and a friendly gossip, with perhaps an hour's pottering in the garden. He suffered much about this time from headache and depression, and

Terence prescribed for him. In fact, with a good liver tonic, and his own genial society, Terence wrought a miraculous cure. The universe brightened once more for Mr. Tredethlyn, the bitter pessimism that comes of dyspepsia was lightened, the charm of easy lounging began once more to assert itself. His gratitude was deep and large; for, rare as that virtue may be, the successful treatment of a man's liver will evoke it if he possess a human heart at all.

Thus, with every intention of avoiding the Tredethlyns, Terence constantly found himself on the road to Moor Gates. If there were no invitation from Mr. Tredethlyn, Simon himself would be sure to drive his friend over on some excuse or other.

Simon was in Chillington almost every day just now, looking after some allotment gardens, for which he had given a piece of land below the town, or putting finishing touches to the White House, as Terence's new home on the hill was named. Towards evening he would usually look in upon his friend, and often enough would carry him off to Moor Gates there and then. It was such an easy way of giving pleasure to every one, himself included. The whole household welcomed Terence. Even Kate, who would never fully subscribe to the general admiration of the young doctor, admitted that she found pleasure in his company. As for Mr. Tredethlyn, he was musical as well as liverish, and always crying out at his daughters for not giving him music enough. Nell sang fairly well, but never reached above mediocrity, while Kate was no performer at all. Now, Clancy wanted style and finish, but his ear was perfect, the quality of his tenor excellent; and Nell's contralto made a good second. Mr. Tredethlyn liked their duets, and made them practice together a good deal.

"You're up at Moor Gates three or four times a week, ain't you, Terence?" asked Syme one afternoon, as they sat smoking together.

The question seemed innocent enough, springing naturally from what had gone before, yet Terence winced uneasily. He disliked talking about the Tredethlyns with Syme, as the latter was well aware.

"Well, yes; I'm up there pretty often. Mr. Tredethlyn has taken a sort of fancy to me, and they are all very kind and hospitable."

"And Secretan is constantly driving you up there?"

"Simon's a friendly old fellow, certainly."

Terence shifted his feet uneasily; a slight flush of annoyance was detected by his companion, who sat mumbling the stem of his pipe between his thick lips. No need for further question. Syme was

satisfied that he had gauged Terence's mental condition to a nicety. He was of opinion that his impressionable friend was every day falling more deeply in love with Nell, while bent upon never admitting it to himself for fear of his own conscience; that he meant to let things slide on as they would, and thus, in the event of a climax, to find himself in a position to answer the accusing voice with, "I meant nothing; I never dreamed of such a thing. It is fate!"

Though himself of much coarser grain, Syme was able to probe and analyze the complex nature of Terence Clancy, and knew precisely why he was now sometimes depressed amid all his elation; knew that the differing elements in his character were engaged in constant drawn battles at this period; that one hour generosity and rectitude had the mastery, and the next slippery self-love. This psychological study was an interesting pastime for Syme, the more so because he fully expected the issue of the struggle to jump with his own desires.

"Ah, here is Secretan!" he exclaimed, after a pause, pointing to Simon, who had just driven past and was pulling up at Clancy's lodgings. "Come to fetch brother Terence as usual, I suppose?"

"I sha'n't go with him; I'm going out fishing."

There was an ugly frown on Terence's face.

"Why, man alive, you'll disappoint them all up at Moor Gates!"

Syme was careful not to mention names, but could not resist playing with his friend.

"I sha'n't go," Clancy reiterated, angrily. "I shall send your boy across to say I've gone out fishing and sha'n't be back for hours."

"Poor Simon! Has he offended his affectionate friend?"

"Curse your sneering ways, Jack Syme; I hate to hear you speak of Simon!"

"Lucky man! What a friend he has! A man who can't bear a word against him—loves him like a brother, and will stand by him through thick and thin!"

Terence's temper was going and his caution with it.

"So I would stand by him—and will, if he ever wants a friend."

"Lord preserve him from his friends, then!" grinned Syme.

"What do you mean? What do you insinuate?" cried the other, striding fiercely across the room.

"There, be aisy, Pat! You fly out like an angry woman! What should I insinuate, man? I'm as innocent as a babe."

"I hate your damned sneering ways!"

"A starving doctor must work off his spleen somehow, Terence;

and a man can't always be cussing. Come, you've known what it is to be poor and bitter yourself."

"Why are you always so down on old Simon, who is the best fellow alive? Because, forsooth, an old woman died, thanks to your being the worse for liquor and incapable of attending her, and Simon—"

"Because," cried Syme, in a savage voice, which made Terence's wrath seem thin and trifling as a girl's—"because he chose to denounce me for that slip, to spoil my chance, take the bread out of my mouth. Damn his virtuous tongue and maudlin benevolence. I mean to be even with him for all that!"

"Well, that was hard, Jack. I feel for you there; having known the sting of poverty myself, as you say. But now I'm coming in for this practice, I shall be able to give you a hand, old fellow—pass you on some patients; and, if business flourishes, maybe I shall want an assistant."

"Upon my soul, you're a good-hearted fellow, Terence, though—a bit slippery," Syme was going to add; but had the grace to check his tongue.

"And as for old Simon, I can't tell you what he has been to me, how consumed with impotent gratitude towards him I feel. Well, now I must make a start down the river, so lend me your rod and fly-book, Jack."

Jack Syme watched his friend march cheerfully off down the road to the stile and into the meadows, stopping to wave his rod before he disappeared by the river.

"He *means* well," mused Syme. "But Lord help Secretan all the same!"

As Terence sauntered by Chilling water, stopping to make a cast here and there in leisurely fashion, he was flushed with a glow of conscious virtue. He felt that there was genuine nobility in his renunciation of the evening's pleasure at Moor Gates. Pleasure! That was a mild term for the satisfying happiness of being with—with people who understood and appreciated him. What was *she* doing at this moment? Practising the second of the new duet they were to have sung to-night? Would she be a little disappointed when Simon drove up without his friend? Terence thought so, and the thought sent a swirl of pleasure through his system, followed by a sour reaction. It was hard to be loaded with gratitude, to be chained like a dog to a post, to be given his food and drink and have his body pampered while his soul starved. What — what unutterable

happiness! Yes, yes, it had truly come to that—happiness beside which mere material prosperity was as nothing, was set just beyond his reach, just outside the utmost stretch of his chain! Should he cast off this chain, refuse Simon's gift, frankly and honestly enter the lists against him? Why should sweet Nell be sacrificed on the altar of honor? Oh, curse these trammels of conventionality, by which warm hearts were kept from beating! Refuse the gift—win and wear Nell? The idea was magnificent, intoxicating! But could she be won, with her quixotic fidelity, her rigid sense of truth and loyalty?

"No, no; she's no true woman," muttered Terence, resentfully. "With her, honor comes before love. And if I failed, what a morass of poverty before me!"

He sighed heavily. Never had the craving for sympathetic appreciation been so strong upon him. He reeled up his line quickly, and began to hasten his steps as though making for some definite goal.

Deep down in the Hollacomb woods there was an elbow of the river called "Black Pool," into which the narrowed Chilling foamed and gushed over great black-green bowlders. A favorite spot of Terence's; a place lost in the still seclusion of wooded hills, whither a breeze hardly ever found its way. No one else came there—at least, hardly any one. One person he had met there sometimes. She might be there to-day; and he yearned for a sympathetic listener to whom he might hint his troubles. At any rate, Black Pool was worth a trial to-day.

Hot and weary he at length reached his goal, emerging from the oak coppice onto the narrow ribbon of mossy grass that bordered the pool. But Fate was as harsh as usual—no one was there.

He threw himself down irritably among the bowlders, and watched the yellow foam-clots creeping slowly past upon the deep heaving swirl of the backwater. He cast Syme's rod down sulkily, and the slender top-joint snapped in its socket. He could not even fish then; there was nothing left him but a three-mile tramp homeward through the stifling woods. The picture of the cool garden at Moor Gates recurred to Terence insistently. Was Nell sitting at the corner of the larch plantation now? Would she really care when— Hark! What was that? Surely the crisp rip-rip of a woman's drapery among the brake-fern. His mood changed in a moment, his face brightened, a smile hovered about the corners of his mouth.

"'Tis Mary, after all, sure as I'm a sinner! Well, Mary, where have ye hidden yourself all these years and months?"

Mary Pethick was dressed coquettishly in a cream-colored frock with pink ribbons peeping out of its cunning-simple folds; but her manner was dull and depressed. The pretty curves of her mouth drooped like those of a tired child as she shook hands with Terence.

"Was the pink and cream designed for me or Ezekiel?" thought he. "What ails ye at all?" he asked, aloud.

"Oh, I hate the world, and every one in it—that's all!"

"That's a good sweeping statement, Mary, and I hope it 'll ease your mind."

Terence perceived that his rôle must, after all, be that of listener, that his grievances must needs wait awhile.

"Pray don't laugh at me, Mr. Clancy. I can't bear it now, I am so miserable!"

It was clear that a shower was imminent; and Terence's ready sympathy, creeping into his eyes and voice, hastened its arrival. A woman's tears had always a powerful appeal for good-natured Terence. He took her hand and stroked it.

"Come, child, tell me what ails you."

He was much tempted to kiss away her tears, but something withheld him. He had enjoyed many friendly, semi-flirting interviews with pretty Mary, but had never kissed her; and, as it was, she cared for him perhaps a little more than he wished. In fact, Terence had unheedingly drifted into the peculiar position of finding two women, both apparently trembling on the verge of love for him, and each formally betrothed to another man. The situation was intensely titivating to his vanity, while at the same time it filled him with uneasiness. He could not, without grievous loss of self-respect, make open love to Nell—at least he always tried to refrain from doing so. Yet so hard was the task of thus deliberately throwing away happiness that he needed the consolation and encouragement of a sentimental friendship with Mary in order to carry it through; while the secrecy and danger attending upon this friendship—for Terence had a heartfelt dread of Ezekiel Doidge—gave it a special zest and flavor.

As the tears fell from Mary's hazel eyes, Terence had one of his good impulses. Why not, he put it to himself, throw aside this playing with edge-tools up at Moor Gates and ask pretty Mary to be his wife? He would never be happy—never, as he felt in his best moments, be quite straight and loyal to his friend—until he were definitely bound to some one who would keep a jealous eye upon him. Mary was, perhaps, a little vain and shallow, but really gentle

and good-hearted, and somewhat of an heiress, too. Her deaf old father, with whom she lived in the solitary Hollacomb Farm, was a retired tradesman of Chillington, a "warm man," as people said, and she was his only child. Mary was refined and accomplished, moreover; she held her head far above the tradesmen's daughters of the town, leading a very lonely life in consequence. Her birth was no serious bar, from Terence's point of view; he was psasant-born himself. And as the wife of the leading doctor of the neighborhood, she would probably make her way well enough, he considered. As for Ezekiel Doidge, she would doubtless throw him over without hesitation, were the brilliant Terence to hold up his finger. Ah! there was the hitch. A prize so easily captured seemed hardly worth the winning; there was no romance, no fascinating "perhaps" in the matter. Yet Terence was much moved in this direction, the good impulse was strong within him. Mary's future, as well as that of several others, was hanging in the balance just now, and much would depend, did she but know it, upon how she handled Terence, now that the good impulse had made him workable.

Mary did not begin well. With a man of quick perceptions like Mr. Clancy she should have been always on her guard, always at her very best, always endeavoring to veil the natural selfishness of a spoiled girl. To enlarge upon Ezekiel's tiresome devotion was hardly the way to evoke the worship of another man; but she was too full of her troublesome lover to keep silence about him. She described, in a querulous, half-tearful way, his jealous exactions, his insistent desire to possess her every thought, hope, and feeling. She told how he had lately purchased, simply with a view to exalting himself in her eyes, the *Chillington Free Press*, and now did half the editing work himself; how he flooded its columns with long, flowery articles from his own pen, and always persisted in reading them aloud for her edification.

"And, would you believe it, Mr. Clancy," she concluded, "Ezekiel has taken to the violin! Just to please me he slaves away at it half through the night, and for it neglects much of his business at the mill during the day. He wishes to accompany me in my songs —*me*, and he has no ear! It is horrible to hear him saw his way through true notes and false with equal ardor. Ah! if he would but be satisfied with his literary compositions and spare me that dreadful music! But I don't know what he wouldn't attempt to win my approval."

"I see what it is," commented Terence, when her outburst had

come to an end, "the man is fool enough to care for you too much. That's fatal with any woman, and with most men as well. Too much love is far worse than too little—a hateful truth, isn't it? a painful comment upon poor human nature."

Mary only pouted and was silent. She wanted, not philosophic analysis, but sympathetic appreciation. She thought Mr. Clancy would have been jealous of her lover's devotion, while he seemed to regard it simply in the light of an interesting phenomenon.

"You don't feel for me a bit!" she cried, petulantly. "You don't care how wretched I am! You haven't been here for weeks; you don't know what a burden I have to bear. I'm afraid of Ezekiel; and you can't say that I've been untrue to him, for I never pretended to love him."

"Why not throw him over, Mary? Surely that would be the honest thing to do?"

"I *dare not!* you don't know him. He has strange notions about justice and punishing people. I fear him—oh, I fear him! I dread even to think of these meetings of ours coming to his ears. He would punish me, and you, too, in some dreadful way. You laugh now, but you wouldn't then; you don't know Ezekiel. Mr. Clancy, I do hope you never mention my name to a human soul?"

"Why, of course not, Mary."

"I haven't courage or strength," continued Mary, with emotion, "to get clear of Ezekiel by myself. He hangs upon me like an old man of the sea."

"Couldn't your father help you?"

"No, no, no! He reveres Ezekiel, and fears him too, and is bent upon my marrying him. You see, Ezekiel owns a good deal of land, as well as the flourishing business of the mill. He is the wealthiest man in Chillington, and hardly considers even the county people above him; in fact, he looks upon your friend Mr. Secretan as a sort of rival."

Terence laughed.

"Sure the man's an hysterical fool. Why ever did you get engaged to him, Mary?"

"It was just vanity, I suppose," she answered, simply. "It was so delicious to have the important, clever Mr. Doidge half dying for love of me. Ah, he was in earnest too, and is still. I can't tell you how he loves me—poor Ezekiel!"

"Oh, well, if you pity him so much as all that—"

"Yes—but I pity myself more."

"Then you must shake yourself clear, my good child; not all of a sudden, but gradually. Make it unpleasant for him; treat him with doses of coldness and slow-torturing jealousy, and, bedad! he'll be glad enough to be rid o' ye."

"But wouldn't that be rather—mean?" Mary asked, with a deprecating blush.

"By the powers! if you're too timid to speak out, and too high-flown even for innocent manœuvring, ye'd better fix your wedding-day and have done with it."

"Pray don't be angry with me!" pleaded the girl, humbly. "You're the only friend I have. There's not a soul in the place for me to confide in, except you and—and I'm so very miserable."

Terence was angry at her implied rebuke of him; but all the same she had risen in his estimation. Mary was more honest, sounder at the core, than he had thought. Without knowing it, she was now pleading her own cause, not ineffectually. His little fit of temper passed quickly. He eyed Mary furtively as she sat before him on the rock, her small hands folded in her lap. In her humble, pleading mood, with gentle hazel eyes swimming, she looked very pretty and alluring. Again did Terence ask himself, "Why not?" and "Should I be safe with her?"

There was something almost pathetic in his self-distrust, his desire to be held straight, tied down, kept true. If he lacked stability, he was far from lacking kind feeling; and just now he was entering upon one of those self-luminous moments that come at times to most men, the brief epochs when the difficult command, "Know thyself," can really be obeyed. With swift shame he realized through what a morass of small treacheries he had been wading lately; how he had been making covert love to Nell day by day, cunningly and carefully planning how to lull any possible suspicions of those around her, luring her into caring for him by imperceptible degrees. His every look and word had been a disloyalty to his friend. With swift penitence he swore now to purge himself of this trickery and falsehood. Already, perhaps, he had compromised Nell's peace of mind, reduced to a minimum his benefactor's chance of married happiness. Simon should nurse an adder no longer. Terence vowed to draw out his own treacherous sting, to be a true and faithful friend from this day forth. Ah, how cheering and cleansing was this resolution! Already Terence felt a stirring akin to the exaltation of a Wolsey upon finding "the blessedness of being little": "the blessedness of being honest is better still," he muttered.

Mary saw that he was engaged in a mental wrestle as he strode to and fro on the narrow strip of green. A soft glow of happiness began to steal over her. He was coming nearer to her; the gallant, the handsome, the admired Terence Clancy was really growing to love her. How gladly, with his love to sustain and prop her weakness, would she extricate herself from this hateful engagement, aye, and would make Terence a good and faithful wife. She loved him; she knew it now. It had come upon her quite suddenly. She turned her swimming eyes upon him, and his own caught fire at their shining.

He drew nearer to her; his flushed face was bending down to hers, his hand seeking her hand. Almost—almost she had won him!

Alas for poor Mary! At the very moment of her triumph Clancy paled, starting back hastily.

"Some one is coming!" he whispered, glancing nervously upstream; "a fisherman, I think. Good Heaven, 'tis that black Ezekiel himself! Run, Mary! Meet me here this time three days hence. I sha'n't be free before. Run hard, child!"

He had snatched up his rod and switched flies and gut anyhow among the eddies before Mary had well disappeared.

"Well met, doctor—well met, sir!" Ezekiel was exclaiming five minutes afterwards. "Fishing away hard, I see. I'm trying to get a trout or two myself for—for my sweetheart, Mary."

The strong dark man blushed like a girl; his voice grew tender with the mention of his sweetheart's name.

"You haven't chanced to see her about here, I reckon, mister?"

"No, no; Miss Petherick do you mean?"

"Pethick's the name, sir—Mary Pethick."

"No, I've seen no one."

"Well, she don't often come down to the river, on account of the steep climb up to the farm. She walks by the canal mostly. Reckon I'll start up-along at once."

"Stop a minute, and give me a hint or two about your local flies; there's a good fellow."

"You'm welcome to all my knowledge, mister; an' I know more about fishing than any one for miles round. Your flies are too small for our Chilling, I see. You want a good-sized Red Spinner with gold twist, an Oak, and a Blue Upright. That's your cast for today. Take some o' my flies, doctor; they'm better tied than any you'll buy about here. Take the whole bookful, for I'm in a hurry."

"You're awfully good-natured, I'm sure. Don't let me keep you.

One moment, though. What do you think of these little Gray Spiders?"

"Ain't worth a damn," cried Doidge, impatiently. Before the words were out of his mouth he had plunged into the woods.

"She has got a fair start," muttered Terence. "But may the devil fly away with that cock-a-hoop, omniscient fool for giving me such a scare!"

Then he wended his way homeward, somewhat chilled and depressed, as well as frightened at his narrow escape. Fate always seemed to thwart him in his good moments, and to hustle him forward in his bad ones.

CHAPTER VIII

The so-called "canal," beside which stood her solitary home—Hollacomb Farm—was a gently-sliding piece of water that seemed to Mary Pethick to have been running through her life like a thread, binding the simple incidents together, and serving as a connecting-link between the dull-gray home-existence and the brighter possibilities of Chillington town. This canal was simply an artificial stream or leat, by which a portion of the limpid Chilling was conducted from its main bed (a dam being formed just below the town bridge to facilitate the operation), past a couple of disused mines, and so into the only big river of the neighborhood, the Culmer. The leat had been designed as a carrier for the two mines; but their owner having failed about the time of its completion the workings were discontinued, and the little river never knew the burden of a single hundredweight of metal. It began its career by running briskly through the vicarage garden; then, losing energy as it drew away from its foaming parent, dawdled curvingly through the meadows below John Syme's surgery, under the stone bridge which carried the Monks Damerel road; past the new church and last outlying cottages of the town, and so vanished into the leafy fastnesses of Hollacomb.

The path beside the canal, as being the only route townward, was more than familiar to Mary. She would fall out with the little stream as with a friend—one day walking briskly along it to some musical triumph at the town-hall, the next mooning sadly along its banks, complaining of the emptiness of her lot. She would, in fanciful moods, share her griefs and pleasures with this friendly companion, or throw a brace of leaflets upon its surface to represent herself and the lover of the moment. For, to speak frankly, Mary had accepted the adoration of quite a little army of lovers. Her musical talents, coquetry, and other attractions had wrought much havoc in the neighborhood; the cream of all the young shopkeepers of the town and well-to-do farmers from the country round had been at Mary's feet.

Nor was there any one to keep the girl in check. The deaf old father left her to go her own way; her only other relations in the

place, the two ancient Miss Pethicks, who kept the circulating library, had all the will to keep a tight rein on Mary, but lacked the necessary judgment and nicety of hand. Too much flicking with whip and sawing with bit had induced that state of nervous irritation in which retaliation upon the occupant of the box seat becomes the main object in life. Thus Mary never acquired a new sweetheart without straightway parading him before the eyes of those critical aunts; and doubtless one of her minor objections to Ezekiel was the satisfaction her engagement to him gave the Miss Pethicks. Not that they made her pleasant speeches upon the subject, but rather were careful to declare, with the native fatuity of spiteful people, that the wealthy and respected Mr. Doidge was a deal too good for their feather-headed niece.

Ezekiel himself, to do him justice, had now—whatever had been his former views—no thought of being too good for Mary. Perhaps she was the only created being to whom he did *not* think himself superior; but towards her he had learned to show a humility quite at variance with the main drift of his character, which sometimes touched her deeply, sometimes encouraged her to bully him. For poor Ezekiel managed to be over-intense in his humility, as he had been in his arrogance, and as he would be in all things to the end of the chapter. He was a man as little understood by his public as Simon Secretan himself. Some people went so far as to call him half-crazy, hinting darkly that there was madness in the Doidge family; others thought the hot Celtic blood inherited from a long line of Cornish ancestors was enough to account for even his vagaries of passion. At any rate, his fierce devotion to Mary was a kind of furnace in which many of his faults had been burned up and purged away.

How this perfervid and peculiar lover would eventually fare at the hands of so wayward, and presumably shallow, a girl as Mary Pethick people often wondered; but by being present at a single interview between them we may be in a position to make forecasts on our own account.

It is the day but one after Mary's interview with Terence Clancy by Black Pool. Ezekiel has been spending the best part of the afternoon at the farm, practising the violin, and has the instrument tucked under his arm now as he and Mary stroll by the canal.

At the present moment he is hardly recognizable as the overbearing Mr. Doidge of the Mill, whose arrogance, as his enemies have been known to declare, mars the peace of a whole community. His

hard, black eyes are softened; his brow smoothed; his shabby clothes, which are generally understood to be part of his greatness, have been changed for decent attire; the whole physical aspect of the man speaks to the softening effect of Mary's presence.

This kinder mood has been commoner with him lately; all those about him have remarked his growing forbearance. Bitter experience has at last taught him that to be at one moment a door-mat for a man to trample upon, at the next a lay figure whereon to exhibit his general superiority, is not the ideal of all women—a useful discovery; but, meantime, what of Mary?

She has been meeting Terence Clancy, basking in the sympathy of a softer, more genial nature than Ezekiel's—in the friendship of a man his superior in culture, breeding, and every outward quality that makes for love. She is thinking of Terence now—thinking with gentle melancholy of the parting by the pool, and with a strange fluttering hope of the "meeting on the morrow." By nature she is wayward, not false; but these two men—one by hard superiority, the other by dangerous, unthinking kindness—have sapped her fealty, prepared the soil of her heart for a crop of treachery to be reaped in due season.

"Mary dear," says Ezekiel, stooping to look in her face, "you're a little witch. You've been making odd changes in me lately. I let off a mill-hand with a reprimand this morning, whom a month ago I should have sent packing. Somehow I've got to think that bare justice doesn't sum up the whole duty of man to his fellow—"

"Well, you've never stopped at bare justice, Ezekiel; you've gone far beyond that in dealing with your fellow-man; you've given him cutting criticism, hard words, and many other little extras. Pray don't upbraid yourself too readily!"

"You are hard, bitter hard to-day, Mary. Ah, you know how to wound a man when you're in this mood!"

"Yes; I've borrowed some of your nature. One can't touch pitch without being defiled, you know."

Ezekiel's pale face—he is a pale man, though broad-framed and muscular—is full of pain.

"Don't be too hard, my girl; don't throw away the power for good you have over me!"

"Oh, I decline to be responsible for you. You've made my life a burden to me, more or less, for the last six months, and I won't be made to bear the weight of your soul as well as your heart."

Mary notes with pleasure how he winces under her lash. She

hardly knows herself; is amazed at her own delight in hurting another's feelings. Is it the after-sting of past, wearing jealousies and tiresome exactions that gives her this new taste? She seizes upon the excuse with avidity, yet it is more probably exasperation at Ezekiel's present kindness that moves her. Her duplicity pricks her conscience now that he shows his better side; his humble devotion stands in the way of the comforting self-justification she desires.

"Let us change the subject," says Ezekiel, mastering his fiery temper with difficulty, and thrusting his shaking hands into his pockets; "let us go back to the music. Don't you think I've improved lately? Lord knows I've worked at it like a slave!"

"Just so. You have improved because you *have* worked at it like a slave, not on account of any talent."

"But I played well this afternoon? You said so yourself."

"Yes, well for *you*, Ezekiel; but, unfortunately, you have what I may call a fatal ear, which is far worse than none at all. You keep true for a time, then play, perhaps, a quarter of a note flat, and half kill the listener. If a string runs down, you're not aware of it; you rasp the ear just as you often rasp one's feelings—from sheer inability to—"

"That's enough. See there—that thing 'll never sound a false note again!" Seizing his violin by the neck, he has brought it furiously down upon a gate-post, smashing it to fragments.

"Come, that is indeed a proof of my power, and a welcome one," she cried, with a mocking laugh.

"What has come to you, Mary? You never used to find pleasure in jeering at me!"

"Because your teaching has taken some time to soak in. But now I am equal to the task of wounding anybody."

A kind of despair now fell upon Ezekiel. With a sickening pain it dawned upon him that his reform had come too late; that Mary's heart had really slipped from his grasp. The fear was not new, though hitherto his stubborn egoism had always been equal to the task of casting it aside.

"Mary," he muttered with dry lips, "are you turning from me?"

The yearning humility of this man, who was never humble to any one, touched the girl in spite of herself. Her mocking laugh ceased abruptly, her eyes began to fill.

"Up till lately you've been so hard and jealous and domineering that now I don't know how—"

"How to take me? God forgive me!" cried the passionate man;

"I've deserved this. I've done my best to earn your hatred. I can make no excuse—can only throw myself upon your mercy."

They were standing now at an elbow of the canal, some distance below the farm, where the water deepened suddenly, creeping sluggishly along, reed-fringed, and canopied by heavy alders. Close to them was an old stone bridge, moss-grown, half buried in ivy.

"See, Mary"—he led her onto the bridge by the hand—"here's the spot where you first put this little hand into mine. 'Tis a sacred spot to me. I've never glanced at another woman since then, dear. Conceited fool though I be, I've always loved you. Put that down as a makeweight to my other faults—nay, nay, don't balance up my failin's at all, sweetheart, but just bear with me a little longer. Give me one month to win you back in; for that time I won't so much as speak of love to 'ee; I'll be just a humble servant waiting on your pleasure."

"Ezekiel, I'd rather not—be engaged any more."

"You won't give me even that chance?" He leaned upon the bridge parapet as though oppressed by physical weakness. "Is there—some one else, Mary?"

"You've no right to ask!" cried she, with flaming cheeks.

"No right—to—ask? and you—my—betrothed wife?"

"I wish to be so no longer; I entreat you to release me. Oh, I want to be free—*free;* I can hardly breathe under this miserable weight!"

"Mary, is it that—that Secretan?"

There was a quick flutter of surprise in Mary's face. She moved away from the bridge, thinking hard, her eyes on the grass. Circumstances had suddenly, without a moment's warning, placed a peculiar temptation in her path. She perceived at once what had given this drift to Ezekiel's jealousy. She had always admired the stately Simon, both as being a fine, handsome man, and as one whose praises were especially obnoxious to Ezekiel. Moreover, Simon had frequently been at the farm lately to see her father, who, upon retiring from business and the Chillington world, had revived an ancient taste for reading, with a special leaning in the direction of mild science. He devoured with avidity all works on popular astronomy; and good-natured Simon would often take the Hollacomb route into the town, in order to provide Mr. Pethick with a new book, or exchange a few shouting remarks on the last one read. More than once Ezekiel had seen His Mightiness, as his jealousy was wont to name Simon, ride into the small farm-yard; and Mary was

always careful to greet Mr. Secretan with particular effusion when Ezekiel happened to be anywhere about.

In this way the seed had been sown quite simply and naturally, and now was Mary's opportunity for rooting up the young plant by a single honest word. A month ago she would have done so without a moment's hesitation, but now she wavered, weighing pros and cons. The honest course was no longer a first instinct; the poison of duplicity had begun to work in her. Again, just as Terence and she had been so lately, she was at the meeting of two ways, and without a suspicion that much hung upon her decision. People are constantly thus in a position to carve out their own destiny; circumstances, which seem to move in a resistless tide, are constantly pausing, as it were, to give human weakness a chance; so that most tragedies, upon looking back, are seen to have been led up to by a whole vista, not so much of accidents as of missed opportunities. And these mile-stones on the road to disaster have the curious property of becoming bigger and clearer the farther we get from them.

To let an honorable man such as Simon Secretan be seriously suspected would a few weeks back have been low conduct in Mary's eyes. Even now she shrank from the trickery; yet—yet this definite despatch of Suspicion upon a false scent would be highly convenient. She had a real dread of Ezekiel; she feared him for Terence's sake, more and more as Terence grew more dear. Now, with Ezekiel safely embarked upon a false scent, she and Terence could meet with comparative safety, and—and very soon—as soon as ever she was free of her present lover—she would become bound to Terence; he would acknowledge her as his betrothed wife. Ezekiel would do nothing then; she did him the justice to believe that he would never move a finger to bar her happiness, but until then he was not to be trusted. After all, it seemed safer, wiser, almost more right, to let him continue in his mistake.

Mary felt something like a return of sympathy towards Ezekiel when she rejoined him on the bridge. There was no visible self-pity about him, and his stoicism always provoked her respect. No one ever knew this man cry out when he was hurt; his weak health —probably especially irksome to a man of such vigorous spirit— was never hinted at by himself. If he looked for patient endurance from other people, his precepts were certainly well backed by example. Mary laid a hand on his shoulder, but he shook it off roughly, asking again:

"Is it really Mr. Secretan, though you're always laughin' at my jealousy o' he?"

She turned aside without speaking—lied without opening her lips.

Ezekiel laughed mockingly, without looking up from the water. He was in reality relieved by her confession, since a rival in his own class must needs have been far more dangerous. She could have nothing more than a passing fancy for one so much above her.

"How can you be such a fool, Mary?"—his voice spoke of returning hope. "Surely you ha'n't believed the absurd rumor that his engagement is shaky—that Dr. Clancy has been cutting him out up at Moor Gates?"

"The flush called up by her falsehood ebbed suddenly from Mary's cheek.

"Who told you that?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Pshaw! Some long-eared fool or other—Chillington breeds plenty of 'em. Dr. Clancy's a favorite up there, as everywhere else; and our long-ears build a two-storied scandal on that little circumstance. You don't know the doctor, by-the-bye, do you?"

"No."

"Well, I do; and he's the last man in the world to go sneaking after other people's belongings. A decent, modest fellow enough, is Clancy, rather like a woman to look at, but well enough for a doctor. I shall probably recommend him to my friends, so long as he don't grow uppish. However, he has nothing to do with *us*, Mary, and I must now tell you what I propose to do. I'm willing to admit that I've rather driven you into foolishness lately, but then you have my promise of amendment. I won't set you free yet; you remain bound to me for one week more; then, not till then, you shall cut me adrift. I wouldn't keep you unwillin', my girl, but I won't have you leaving me for a mere whim neither. And whether bound to me or not, be very sure that I shall keep a watchful eye on you. If that Secretan casts a single glance your way that he shouldn't, let him look to himself; but I don't suspect him seriously—at least, not yet. And now we'll get along back to the farm. Don't be afear'd that I shall make love to you. I would leave you here now this minute, but I don't care to have you wandering about these solitary paths alone."

CHAPTER IX

Terence Clancy had for the first time in his life spent the night under a roof that was his very own. He had been called by his own servant, bounded lightly down his own stairs, breakfasted off his own plates of quaint old china, looking out upon the smooth lawn and old-fashioned flower-beds of his own garden. The fresh, keen joy of possession made his eyes sparkle; his heart swelled as he stood under his creeper-clad veranda, looking down over the little town, peaceful, sunlit, and with the bright ribbon of Chilling Water flashing here and there between the intercepting gray walls, and foaming through the breadth of emerald beyond. But yesterday he had been a struggling seeker after daily bread—and now! Why, now he owned one of the best houses in Chillington, with a hack and a hunter in its stables—for he found to his joy that he would be expected to hunt one day a week during the season, Dr. Rose having firmly established that desirable custom—and, in short, everything he had ever hoped for. The practice was the best in these parts; he would need an assistant as soon as he settled down, and proposed to engage Jack Syme, thus setting the old fellow on his legs at a stroke. It all seemed like magic; Simon's generosity had given him a new lease of life, converted the dim world into a joyous playground.

Nor had Terence any intention of finally accepting all this as a gift; in the course of a few years he would easily save enough to repay old Simon every penny. For from this day forth he was going to be a steady, careful, safe, hard-working man; all his little weaknesses were to be thrown aside. Already he could reflect with encouragement upon one piece of prudence safely accomplished—he had cut himself adrift from pretty Mary Pethick. Business had prevented his keeping the appointment made by Black Pool a short time since, and his new-born sobriety would prevent his making another. It would, after all, be absurd to hamper himself with a wife while upon the very threshold of his career; nor would his old weakness for feminine sympathy trouble him, now that he had work into which he could throw himself with heart and hope.

All the business connected with the house and garden had been accomplished, and to-night Simon was to dine with him; after which they were to adjourn together to a solicitor's office, with a view to completing also the deed of assignment of Dr. Rose's practice.

Emerging presently from his reflections under the veranda, Terence hurried into his little study and wrote off a jubilant letter to his family in Ireland, requesting that two out of the six younger brothers should at once be sent over to be brought up and educated at his expense. The comfort of thus giving a helping hand to his people, whom he had rather forgotten during the last year or two, elated him still further. He strode out again into the sunlight, and glanced along the road which dipped steeply into the town.

Just rising the hill Terence saw a cavalcade, which sent his heart into his mouth. He had not been up to Moor Gates for some time, had resolutely refused the invitations brought by Simon, and now, as though to reward his self-denial, Moor Gates was coming to him. It was the culminating moment of the morning when he caught sight of the cavalcade, which comprised Simon Secretan—easily recognizable by his tall figure and the big iron-gray he rode—and three ladies; to wit, Mrs. French-Chichester, Miss Tredethlyn, and, yes—Miss Nell.

Simon trotted on ahead of his convoy, rode in through the front gate and round the little gravel sweep, and was greeted by Clancy from the steps.

"Terence, I've news for you—I hear that the peal are running up the Culmer in shoals. You must get out your fourteen-footer and mount instanter. I've been wanting something of this sort, just to celebrate the commencement of your reign at the White House. You can't begin work to-day; every one knows you're not half settled down yet. As there's sport in question, I ought to have left the ladies at home, but they *would* come, and have promised faithfully not to interfere with us—in fact, to let us alone and look after the lunch. Probably Rush will join us too, for I've sent him a message. Come, don't hesitate, old fellow; tell them to saddle 'Rosalind' at once, while you get out the tackle."

Terence's heart gave a great leap. A long day in the Culmer Vale with the Tredethlyns? The prospect made him dizzy. He was not allowed to avoid them. Fate positively threw them across his path. Could he refuse? Impossible—he could not throw away this last perfect holiday. To-morrow he would be in harness, and this would

be his very last scamper; and he was not made of cast-iron; and—and at this point he vanished in-doors.

A quarter of an hour later they were all cantering through the Hollacomb woods along a moss-grown bridle-path. Terence rode in front with Mrs. French-Chichester and Nell, by whose side he had never ridden before. The sunbeams were dancing across the glades, streaming through crisp foliage of dwarf oaks; the rush of the hidden Chilling was filling their ears with merry music; the summer breeze was playing with Nell's dark hair.

Nell had been out of sorts and depressed lately, but to-day a change had set in and her spirits were radiant; while as for Mrs. French-Chichester, she was never one to refuse the challenge of bright weather and genial company. Moreover, she had good reason to be satisfied with things in general this morning, for was not Simon, with the delightful fatuity which always distinguished him in matters which concerned his own interests, playing into her hand, thrusting Nell into the very charmed circle that had been prepared by herself?

Nor did Terence fail to note the widow's sly satisfaction. He was far too clear-sighted not to be aware that she had been working to a certain end lately; he could always feel her hand at his back, as it were, thrusting him gently towards Nell. The drift of her desire was patent to him, but her motives puzzled him altogether. He rightly conceived that she would not be taking all this pains for the mere gratification of an old grudge against Simon, but what further motive could she have? This problem was beyond him at present, but he meant to work out a solution ere long.

Meanwhile she poured forth such a stream of anecdote and banter that her auditors only recovered from one fit of laughter in time to fall headlong into another. Most of her tales were about Simon and his fads; for in the art of administering a full dose of disparagement, disguised in a froth of chaff and raillery, she had few equals, and this opportunity was not be to thrown away. She had the light quick touch which makes comedy out of anything, and pricks a character so deftly that no wound shows. She seemed to be praising Simon while she was really drawing blood from him, and the quiet woodlands rang with the merriment of as cheery a party of three as had ever cantered across the velvet shadows of Hollacomb.

Miss Tredethlyn and Simon were in a far less genial frame of mind. Kate had chosen to fall back some distance behind the others. There was an atmosphere of coming storm about her, which

Simon might have perceived by her smart way of laying her whip to her horse, and by the drawing together of her dark brows; but he was dreaming as usual, pondering with satisfaction over the hopeful prospects of his friend Terence.

"Simon—" began his companion in her most peremptory tone, checking her chafing horse as they first turned into the woods.

"He's bound to succeed," muttered Simon, "for once in a way one's efforts to give a helping hand will not have fallen flat."

"You are speaking of Mr. Clancy, of course?"

"Yes; I was thinking—"

"Simon, I do wish you would *observe* more and *think* less!"

Now, Simon had a combative side as well as Kate; smart skirmishing was not unknown between them, and, the one being fond of disparaging Clancy, while the other was easily heated in a friend's cause, they now both prepared for the fray.

"I don't much believe in this popular hero of yours."

"Substitute 'appreciate' for 'believe,' Kate. You're too hard and cynical in your estimate of people, if you'll allow me to say so."

"You're too blindly good-natured and idealistic in *your* estimation of them, if you'll allow me to say so."

"I'm perfectly aware that you don't perceive Terence's good qualities."

"And you?" cried Kate, with sudden passion. "You perceive nothing that goes on around you; you go maundering on, lost in some mathematical problem — or philanthropic one, about equally useless—and never see the dangers that beset those who are dear to you! Oh, I know nothing in the world so exasperating as your besotted— There, I can't speak of it in polite language. And I can do nothing with *her;* it would be a kind of sacrilege to take Nell to task about it. A pretty pair of innocents you are—and how bitterly exasperating I find you!"

"What on earth has Nell to do with Terence's good qualities?"

"Nothing—nothing in the world. Nell's an angel; not in the least mortal; without the flesh and blood of ordinary people; and we're all Arcadian shepherds and shepherdesses together."

"I don't know what mare's-nest you've discovered, Kate; I don't in the least understand your drift."

"I know, I know. For mercy's sake, let us talk about crooks, or sheepcots, or something you *do* understand!"

"However," Simon continued, with a slow-spreading flush upon his large, handsome features, "since candor closely bordering upon

rudeness is the order of the day, I don't mind favoring *you* with a home-truth or two. I should like to know, for one thing, why you always think fit to snub and mortify my friend Julius Rush, one of the best fellows going?"

"A rival of the perfect Terence Clancy—another immaculate, dear friend," mocked Kate; "and so well born, too!"

"I tell you frankly that I consider this insistence upon the accident of a man's birth—a man of culture and a thorough gentleman, moreover—downright vulgar."

"What business has a tailor's son with culture? Veneer won't make a gentleman."

"A most abominable sentiment! You would measure a man's worth by—"

"I wouldn't *measure* any one. The mere sight of a yard wand is hateful to me."

So the foolish pair wrangled on, and, thanks to a little infirmity of temper on both sides, this effort of Kate's to hoist a needed danger signal proved entirely abortive.

"You're little better than a Honeywood, Simon, and some day your good-nature will land you in the mire." This was Kate's parting shot. She delivered it with an angry nod and a resentful glance at her companion, then lashed her mare into a gallop and shot away from him.

But neither Simon nor his tall gray were to be left in the lurch thus, and the argument ended in a neck-and-neck race along the glade.

"You've been wrangling as usual, you two!" cried Mrs. French-Chichester, as the combative pair drew rein. "Nell, my dear, you must take charge of Simon while I endeavor to soothe your sister. Keep the fractious couple apart we must, by hook or by crook. Listen, Kate, I have cheering news for you, to the effect that Captain Rush is to join us presently, and will probably bring his father the tail—ahem!—forgive the pain I was on the point of causing you—I should have said the ex-artist-in-cloth-to-the-nobility-and-gentry-of-the-West-End; lengthiness being the soul of delicacy, as brevity of wit. The ex-artist is a connoisseur, Kate; he will appreciate the really excellent build of your habit and Nell's. I must say you both look charming, and your charms will not be wasted this time. I always think there's a close kinship between your tailor and your sculptor, and feel as much moved to pose before the former as the latter."

Simon, whose weakness was to take things too much to heart, was deeply offended by these remarks—just as the speaker intended. Captain Rush was a very old friend of his. They had been at Cambridge together, and their mutual liking had been growing ever since. Rush was a man to be trusted, one he could turn to in a difficulty; for Terence, the newer friend, his affection was of a more protecting, sentimental order. Kate had been disparaging both with equal ardor, and now Cousin Kathleen had given a neat finishing stroke to Simon's irritation.

Nell dreaded an outburst on Simon's part—for he was a hard hitter when roused, and utterly reckless as to whom he offended; but, perceiving the coming storm in time, she managed to draw him away before he had time to commit himself. As she rode forward with him out of ear-shot of the others the cousin smiled maliciously, muttering to herself, "I hope she'll appreciate the difference between this great sulky bear and my pretty boy Terence!"

"What a peace-maker our charming Nell is!" she exclaimed aloud, "and well she may be, Kate, for truly my Lord Simon wants a deal of management. Really, Mr. Clancy, I'm surprised that you can contrive to retain the friendship of this good old hot-headed cousin of mine."

"So am I," acquiesced Kate, in a dry tone, which sounded unpleasantly to Terence. Miss Tredethlyn seemed to be growing suspicious.

Mrs. French-Chichester also made a mental jotting as to Kate's hostile attitude, but was not the least disconcerted thereat. The presence of an opponent always gave additional zest to her schemes; not so much on account of any leaning towards a fair fight, as from the keen pleasure she took in out-manœuvring and overreaching another woman. Yet she looked upon Kate as hardly worthy of her steel; what chance had this honest, hot-tempered, downright creature against so shrewd a pair as Terence and herself?

The present mild skirmish, for Kate was already aiming spiteful shafts at Terence, was a fair sample of the great battle to come. How different was Clancy's delicate rapier-play to Simon's clumsy hitting and slashing! He pretended a little heat at first, but soon began cunningly to laugh with Kate at himself; to blunt all her shafts before they were fairly sped; to guide her back to good temper by a touch here and a pull there, until her mirth took a genuine ring, and the only sort of reproach for which she had a mind was that of self.

"Admirable!" commented the widow; "it is a real pleasure to come across a man with a saving touch of woman's wit about him."

And so they rode along, emerging presently onto the broad, breezy moor, and in due time attaining their destination—a solitary farm perched upon the brink of the Culmer Vale. Here they left their horses; and the two men, having mounted their rods and jumped hastily into their wading-gear, were soon striding down a steep path to the river, their brains filled with the angler's glorious lunacy to the exclusion of all else—past, present, or to come.

CHAPTER X

The anglers found the water rather thick for the fly after late heavy rains, but the river was fining down rapidly, and by mid-day they had achieved just such moderate sport as serves to whet a fisherman's appetite. The luncheon-place had been chosen to suit the men's convenience; they would have no searching after romantic dells, wide prospects, or such-like irrelevances, but just had the hampers laid among the brake-fern, where the oak coppice came steeply down to hang over the great bowlders of the river, and left the ladies to make the most of the situation. They professed, indeed, to have no time for luncheon; Simon refused even to sit down, but stood munching hastily, watching the water, and allowing the prattle of the ladies to float past him. Meanwhile he received their rebukes and chaff with the large good-nature which distinguished him in all matters outside his particular fads.

"The special charm of all picnics," Mrs. French-Chichester observed, "lies in their atmosphere of reality: masks are laid aside, each sex shows in its true colors, and many hidden virtues come to light. There's the noble unselfishness of men, now — who would suspect its existence under more conventional circumstances? In drawing-rooms decency compels them to talk to us and pretend a little pleasure in our society, and we take it all as a matter of course. But out here they are free and untrammelled as the noble savage; here we are truly grateful for a single remark, knowing it to be purely voluntary, since, hampers once unpacked, their duty is over. Yes, if they speak, it must be from sheer pleasure; think of that, my dears, and be ready with your gratitude, for Simon may yet open his lips at any moment almost!"

"A lady's sarcasm," said Simon, calmly perusing his fly-book, "is like some of my flies — very bright and natty, but not a bit killing. Terence, old boy, if Rush doesn't turn up soon I shall make a start up-stream."

In a few minutes, however, Captain Rush did put in an appearance, scrambling down through the oak coppice, while carefully supporting his father on his arm.

"Enter the tailor!" muttered Mrs. French-Chichester. "Shake out your creases, Kate; I'm beautifully posed already."

Kate's eyes looked gloomy; the sight of Mr. Clancy and her sister, seated side by side, seemed to give her little satisfaction.

"They make a pretty pair, too," laughed the widow to herself, "but Kate has no sense of the picturesque!"

Old Squire Rush, as he was called, came forward timidly in his son's wake. He was a very gentle, retiring old man, with a stooping figure, and a little gray beard that seemed somehow to epitomize his personality—being thin, weak, straggling, and in need of constant caressing with his hand. He was a man who had borne his wealth so meekly that the world, for all its deep scorn of trade, had been content to punish him gently, even charitably to admit that twenty years of good country air and abstention from the shop had gone far towards eradicating the trade-taint in his blood. Ladies with marriageable daughters would nearly always lean to this kindly view, for, next to Sir Hamo Secretan's only son, Captain Rush was considered about the best *parti* in the neighborhood. In fact, most mothers would have preferred Bickington, with the Dragoon Guardsman, to Monks Damerel, saddled as it was with eccentric Simon and all his whimseys. The old squire, moreover, would be charmingly manageable. He led a harmless, pottering life at Bickington, having his greenhouses for daily amusement, the anticipation of his son Julius's next visit for daily solace and comfort. Julius was the sun and centre of his existence. He had, it is true, a daughter some two years younger, but, having married a personage of great distinction, she found it difficult to give much attention to the ex-tailor, her father. Julius, however, was all-sufficing to the old squire, who considered him the best son, the cleverest man, and the finest gentleman in the three kingdoms. With Julius to back him, he would face even his own servants, upon whose attitude and conduct in general Captain Rush's home-coming had always a most beneficial effect.

While Julius was away soldiering, however—that is to say, during the greater part of the year—these servants of his took care that the old man should know his place, and keep to it. For the art of giving pain to inferior people is not confined to the upper classes; and the Squire of Bickington — whose long experience in this relation surely entitled him to form a definite opinion—at heart considered his butler, Mr. John Children, the hardest and most merciless of all his critics.

Never was conventional poor governess more systematically crushed by hard employer than was this old gentleman by the servants whom he only kept up for his son's sake. Indeed, upon one occasion the memory of his wrongs stirred up the gentle old squire almost to the point of rebuking a fellow-man. For he chanced one afternoon to travel back from Lymport in company with a worthy Socialist of the neighborhood, who entertained him with a long harangue against the cruelties of domestic servitude. Mr. Rush listened patiently, but with growing warmth. When they reached Chillington and parted, he raised his hat somewhat shakily, and murmured in what he felt to be quite a savage way—

"Sir, I've heard you with interest; but if you was to come and spend a week with me in my home I think you'd learn a thing or two as you don't know at present. Excuse my plain speaking, but —but I don't mean anythink unkind. Good-evening, sir."

After this he got into his carriage, feeling very warm, and perhaps a little proud of his courage, though compunction for his churlishness set in strongly some ten minutes afterwards.

But there was one person who gave Mr. Rush more pangs and woes even than McTavish, his head-gardener, or Children, his butler, and this was Miss Tredethlyn; to please whom, as being the lady of his son's choice, was at once a sacred duty and a task beyond the utmost stretch of his powers. He was consumed by a never-satisfied yearning to ingratiate himself with Kate: meek with other people, he was abjectly humble with her, and failed in his end accordingly. No trouble taken in his son's interest was too great; he would read fashionable newspapers in order to brace himself up to Kate's level, wade through magazines and novels without end, so as to be better equipped for pleasing her.

Miss Tredethlyn, in her present ruffled mood, received the father and son with as much ungraciousness as could well be compassed at short notice. Poor Mr. Rush found all his little proffered topics, conned over so anxiously during the long moorland drive, rejected curtly. His simple face became filled with doubt and perplexity; noting which, a grimness came over his son Julius.

Nor did the latter escape Kate's criticism. She began with his appearance. To her scrutinizing eye he was all wrong, from crown of deer-stalker hat to sole of fishing brogues. He was too smart, too well-dressed; there was too much of Hounslow gloss about him to suit present surroundings. "He daren't drop the dragoon for a moment lest the tailor should peep out," commented Kate the

fastidious. Had he put on a shabby coat she would have blamed his affectation.

While his father continued to flutter anxiously about Miss Tredethlyn, fetching and carrying for her like a little dog, Captain Rush made quiet cynical remarks to Mrs. French-Chichester. He was not an emotional man, nor by any means given to carrying his feelings on his sleeve, but he was mentally scoring down black marks against the woman he admired. If ever he conquered Kate Tredethlyn, he vowed solemnly she should go under the Caudine Forks.

Nell was ashamed of her sister. She exerted herself to draw off Squire Rush—who struggled feebly between duty towards Kate and inclination towards herself—and was kind to the old man. Seeing that Kate was in her worst mood, she walked him off along the river-bank, plucked rare ferns for him, and charmed his simple old heart with her caressing ways. "Ah, if that terrible sister were but like her!" muttered the old squire with a sigh.

Kate, however, was not the only person who betrayed annoyance at the advent of these people, for Terence, hating to lose sight of Nell for a moment to-day, felt jealous even of the old man. Simon had started up-stream after greeting the new arrivals, and was safely got rid of for a space—only to leave Nell in the hands of this pottering old bore.

Taking up his rod and basket, Terence presently prepared for a start, while Kate and Captain Rush appeared to be watching him suspiciously. Perfectly aware of their espionage, and inwardly fuming thereat, he headed down-stream, as if with the intention of following Nell and the old man; then, before he had gone many yards, stepped into a shallow and waded outward into the full sweep of the river. Kate breathed a sigh of relief as the rod began to sway rhythmically and the fisherman warmed to his work. She cast a glance at the soldier, but, without even looking at her, he also took up his rod and departed.

"Now, isn't your rudeness justly punished, my dear?" asked Mrs. French-Chichester, mournfully. "Here we are left stranded, you see! Nothing left us now but feminine chatter and the contemplation of empty bottles. Hah! what was that?"

There was a loud splash about fifty yards down-stream, followed by a muttered "Hurroo!" from Clancy. A great silver fish, much too heavy for a peal, had leaped clean out of the water and fallen back. The two ladies scrambled over the rocks in hot haste, for salmon were few and far between on the Culmer.

"Keep down, for mercy's sake," cried the fisherman, "or you'll scare his life out!"

Then he looked anxiously up and down the water. Above him all was plain sailing, with one large pool opening into another, but below was a boiling rapid studded with jagged rocks, down which it would be difficult enough to follow a hooked fish.

"I'll try him with a big Jock Scott," he whispered to the ladies, who were crouching behind a bowlder; "no chance of killing a twenty-pounder like that on a small hook, and with all this rough water about."

He then proceeded to cast with the utmost wariness, lengthening his line out until the fly swirled right over the spot where the big fish lay. It was a great moment for a man who had killed many trout, but never a salmon; every nerve quivered as his bright-hued lure swept round. But no boil came, no glorious jar to the tense nerves—the big fish refused to stir. He reeled up with a shaking hand and waded cautiously ashore.

"I must give him a rest," he muttered, "then try him with a smaller fly."

He lighted his pipe, and spread out his flies on a flat rock. Kate, quite familiar with the flies most favored in these parts, discussed them with him. They talked together most amicably; for the immediate prospect of "killing something," or seeing it killed, will soothe even English spleen.

After a pause, the angler waded in once more to try a small dark fly of Kate's recommendation.

Again the rhythmic sway of the tapering greenheart; again the lengthening process. He was casting a long line, and was too nervous to do his best, but the water was broken enough to cover bungles; the fly came over the right spot at last, and this time there was a boiling heave that sent his heart into his mouth. Should he strike? Before he could settle the question the reel was screaming, the fish rushing swiftly up-stream. Terence tingled with excitement, yet the joy of the moment was laced with deep anxiety. The grand fish leaped thrice into the air. Horrible thought — was he off? No, another fine rush; then perfect stillness—a dead sulk. The angler had time to wipe his dripping forehead.

At this period of the struggle Nell joined the other ladies, having left Squire Rush to accompany his son and witness his prowess. All three watched breathlessly for the salmon's next move.

"I daren't leave him to rub the hook out at his leisure," said

Terence, ruefully. "I must put a strain on, though, bedad, my heart's heavy and my tackle light. Miss Tredethlyn, would you kindly throw a few stones in just below him, for if he heads down I'm done for."

The slight rod was bent into a hoop. The suspense had become painful, when suddenly the fish moved, sailed off quietly at first, then bolted furiously down-stream, Terence splashing through the shallows in headlong chase.

The situation was now a shade too piquant for pure pleasure, for the river narrowed and deepened, and a low wall, which here followed the left bank, forced the angler to follow in the water, or not at all.

Already he had plumped into one or two holes, and his wading stockings were full of water; worse still, his line was nearly run out. Should he hold hard, or follow farther? Kate saw that he was hesitating, and shouted that he could never keep his legs in the next rapid, which was known for a dangerous place. But he must needs venture another yard or two.

The water took him up to the elbows, the heavy waders clogged his movements. A few seconds more and the vehement river had him in its grip, whirling him furiously along, buffeting him against rocks and bowlders at its will.

Kate followed him down, calling loudly for help. In a moment or two she heard, to her inexpressible relief, the crashing of boughs, and Simon leaped down from the oak coppice on her left. From a high rock some distance up-stream he had perceived Terence to be fast in a fish, and had immediately started off, gaff in hand.

"But as it is we shall have to gaff the fisherman, Kate," he gasped, panting for breath. "Keep up your pluck, old boy!" he shouted; "you'll be in the pool directly, and I'll fish you out, sure enough!"

Fortunately the fierce rapid was a short one. Very soon Terence was hurled by it into the pool below, disappearing for a moment or two under the white water at its head. Simon tore off his coat, then waited a moment, watching keenly. He perceived that Terence was nearly spent, and, being now about the centre of the wide pool, and between its two strong backwaters, might be sucked into either. If he were driven under the opposite bank it would be better to gain it through the shallow at the pool's foot and chase him along it; if not— But no further weighing of the question was needed. Terence drifted into the near backwater, and as Kate uttered an exclamation of relief, Simon plunged in.

For a moment or two Kate's heart was in her mouth; she felt that if Terence were once more driven under the white water, there would be nothing but his dead body to recover. But Simon was cool, prompt, and a powerful swimmer. He seized his friend just before the hungry back-wash had gripped him fairly, wrestled strongly with it for a moment or two, then found himself on a sudden in dead water. The rest was simple; he quickly touched bottom, waded a few steps, then took up his burden like a baby and tramped calmly through the remaining shallow water.

Terence was bruised and scared, but had not lost consciousness. He was still clutching his rod, and in want of nothing but rest and a little brandy. Seeing which, Simon handed his flask to Kate, and finding the fish, which had been deeply and firmly hooked, still fast, proceeded to play it as though nothing had happened.

Kate admired his calm way of taking things. She had before noticed that anything in the shape of real danger tended to make Simon cheerful and happy, though almost any trifle in the way of ordinary life, if it happened to cross the vein of his prejudice, would serve to perturb and depress him. "He's an odd fellow," thought she, "and I don't believe Nell understands him even as well as I do."

Kate and Mrs. French-Chichester soon succeeded in reviving Terence sufficiently to be able to help him on his feet. He took a shaky step or two, but his nerves were still unstrung.

"Bravo, Terence! Look sharp and pull yourself together, for your fish is giving in — and land him you must!" shouted Simon from a gravelly point at the lower end of the pool.

Terence tottered off, his eye brightening.

"Simon's a perfect barbarian!" Mrs. French-Chichester muttered angrily.

Kate made no remark, but watched Simon put the rod into his friend's hand, standing ready to support him if necessary, then stoop down, gaff the big fish, and lay it gasping on the gravel.

"There, that's your first salmon, old man; have another pull at the brandy-flask and drink his health. That's all right, and now I'm going to hale you off to the farm for a change of clothes."

There was a gleam of enthusiasm in Kate's eyes.

"Look at him," quoth she; "strong, capable, cool as a cucumber; with a man's power and a woman's tenderness — what an odd, fine, whimsical old Simon it is!"

"He concerned himself a deal more about the fish than about his friend," muttered Simon's cousin.

"By-the-way, what have you done with Nell?"

Nell came towards them as her sister spoke. She had a curious, dazed look, and was deadly pale. When they asked her a question she burst into hysterical tears and laughter.

"What! another candidate for the brandy-flask?" the widow exclaimed. "Come, child, Simon's all right; you were scared at seeing him plunge in, no doubt?"

"I hope so," mused Kate, turning aside as though averse to meeting her sister's eye, "I hope so with all my heart." Then she looked round again, saying sharply, "No nonsense, Nell. I won't have it. Fancy *your* pretending to hysterics!"

"Aha!" thought the widow, "you'll give your sister a bit of your mind to-night, Kate, my dear. You would like to begin now at once, wouldn't you? But beware, lest that tongue of yours bring about your own defeat!"

Simon soon strolled down from the farm again, attired in a carter's smock and corduroy trousers, and bearing an immense black kettle.

They greeted him with shouts of laughter, in which he joined with the zest of a school-boy.

"Terence is too vain to appear in this get-up," he explained; "but I like it. He'll be here soon, so I hope you'll have some tea ready. There's lots of dry brake-fern about for firewood; and I'm afraid you two must pick it up, for I have no time, and Kate's proud spirit would revolt from such menial work." With that, Simon took up his rod, and walked thigh-deep into the pool, much to the detriment of his corduroys.

By the time Terence appeared the kettle was boiling among the rocks at the head of the pool, while Squire Rush and his son busied themselves under Nell's superintendence. Captain Rush had landed two good peal, which the old gentleman proudly displayed to each of the ladies in succession, and would hardly allow out of his sight for a moment. Simon was still flogging away, blowing clouds of tobacco smoke, and wading about with the skirts of his smock swaying gracefully in the stream.

Mr. Clancy was effusively greeted by the ladies. They surrounded him with eager hopes, pityings, and kindly upbraidings. How could he so endanger his life for the sake of a mere fish? How rashly he had ventured into the rapid; how gallantly he had clung to his rod! Was he unconscious when Simon first caught him?

Terence stood laughing and blushing, and enjoying not a little the importance and interest wherewith the ducking had invested him.

While Mrs. French-Chichester poured out sympathy, Nell's lips were silent, but her eyes were eloquent.

Meanwhile the dragoon regarded this sentimental scene with a cynical glance. He felt oddly jealous for his friend, and perhaps a little for himself. Why should Clancy be fussed over and caressed like this? why, the man was undermining Simon, supplanting him with his friends. Even Sir Hamo seemed to care more for this semi-stranger than for his own son. "What is Clancy's game?" He had caught himself asking this question more than once lately, and could in no wise answer it to his satisfaction. He felt a vague distrust of the man, yet had nothing beyond intuitive prejudice to found it upon.

Nell was soon in high spirits again, running over with talk and laughter. Rush, the sardonic, found himself obliged to laugh with the others, and the sliding Culmer joined its music to the merriment of the party. Before they broke up their camp the broad sun had gone behind the western moors, and the pool at their feet was giving back the delicate rose and opal of a placid evening sky.

The ride home that evening was an epoch that made a deep mark in the memory of both Nell and Terence. His exaltation reached a climax none the less poignant from having to be suppressed; for he saw in Nell's eyes what he had hitherto looked for in vain, what he had striven with anxious, patient subtlety to put there, all the while keeping rigidly to the fiction of strict loyalty to his friend. He had made love to Nell without a spoken word, pacifying his flexible conscience with the sophistry that comes so easily to a well-meaning, semi-false nature. He was now in a whirl of triumph. True, there were still some points of difference to be settled with his better self, some jagged fragments of good resolutions rasping him, some underlining of shame to his satisfaction; but for the moment these things could be thrust aside, and he could give his joy full rein.

They were all riding home in a confused group, so that there was nothing to alarm Nell, nothing to sting her loyalty into quickened life. She felt like one in a dream; for in giving her an honest, pure soul, nature had laid her fatally open to such an attack as Terence Clancy's. Even now she remained unenlightened; for the present she was only aware of some strange uplifting of her nature, of an increased joy in the liquid beauty of the sky, in the stealing of gray mists up wooded combes, and the large peacefulness of the moor — quiet as though soothed to rest by its Maker's own voice and hand. She could only listen to her thoughts, she had no power

to analyze them; it seemed as though her heart had gone out of her keeping, and were beating in the broad bosom of nature.

When they entered the green twilight of the woods Terence fell behind with her some little distance. She scarcely heard his words, but his voice fell warm upon her heart, his every glance was a caress. She had forgotten the others, and Terence, filled with reckless exaltation, was hardly master of himself.

Yet it needed but a touch to restore them both to sanity, and Simon himself supplied it.

At a bend in the bridle-path they found him awaiting them, and he at once drew Terence aside, whispering eagerly—

"Canter on, old fellow, and give me an innings, for I have something special to say to Nell."

With anger and bitter jealousy Terence shook his friend's hand from his shoulder and rode on, cursing Simon and his own miserable fate, and the sickening conventions of the world. He knew well enough what the lover had to say; no leap so quick and sure as that of jealous intuition.

"He seems a bit put out," Simon remarked, simply. "I hope you have not been quarrelling with him, dear? You must leave that to Kate, you know."

Nell could not trust herself to speak; she was shaking like a leaf, could hardly retain her seat in the saddle. The truth had come to her with the sound of her lover's voice, the scales had fallen suddenly from her eyes.

Simon, looking shyly away from her into the dusk, and himself not a little perturbed by the task before him, noticed nothing. When he turned, his honest eyes were bent upon her with a look which seemed to immerse her in a hot wave of shame. He had for some time been trying to screw up his courage to the point of preferring a certain request, and had now made up his mind to the plunge so suddenly as to take his own breath away. Yet, perhaps, few lovers could have asked the old old question in a way better calculated to please a woman, had she cared to hear it asked at all. Nell would never forget the simple eloquence which so deepened her shame.

"And how long, my love," he concluded—"how long must I wait? You care for me a little — it won't be so very hard to leave your home for mine?"

Silence, not a whisper; the hushed woods seemed to listen, but no sound came.

Hitherto, when he had spoken of love, it had been in a tongue strange to Nell; spoken passion being a dead thing to a passionless listener, she had always been able to answer him calmly, without any acute sense of the flatness of her own words; but now an abler tutor than Simon had taught her the meaning of heart-language. No commonplace answer would come now; she was dumb.

Simon was deeply hurt. A draught of chill air seemed to pass into his mind. Nell had been moody and capricious with him at times, had taxed his faculty of accusing himself in order to palliate her faults; but this wounding silence was a thing to cut deeper. It was the first sting of the adder which he had been nursing, the first stroke of the lash his bosom friend had prepared for his back.

But Simon's faith was still sound and healthy, not a sickly, puling thing to have its life tweaked out by the first pinch of disappointment. He had none of the facility of disbelief that belongs to the animal, Othello type of man; and in relation to Nell long habit had kept his expectation tuned low, making ready deference to her feeling a first instinct. Even so, however, the tone of his voice, when he spoke again, fell strangely upon Nell's ears.

"I've sprung it upon you," he said. "I've been over-hasty, as usual. Don't vex yourself about it to-night; take a week or two for consideration. I would not for worlds harass you about it. Come, Nell, let us ride on and join the others."

CHAPTER XI

Simon Secretan and his host were unusually silent over their dinner that night. Each exerted himself spasmodically to contribute a little hilarity to the evening, but the failure of either was about equally conspicuous. Simon was vaguely depressed at Nell's cold reception of his entreaty, though as yet not seriously anxious about it. After the first disappointment, the habit of idealizing the woman he loved, of regarding her as above and beyond all criticism, of finding in himself the fault, if at any time she fell short of his expectations, had reasserted itself.

As regards Nell, his critical faculty had positively suffered atrophy from disuse; he had fallen into that fatal obtuseness which is the natural outcome of over-intensity in any passion. As for suspecting his friend, of conceiving him capable of treacherous hankerings after Nell, his mind was not capable of forming the idea, much less of giving it harborage.

Terence, with his feminine intuitiveness and quick-probing sympathy, had no difficulty in reading his visitor's thoughts. He knew, as certainly as though Simon had described it, how Nell had rebuffed him; he knew that Simon was even now making reflections upon his own clumsiness and want of tact, that nothing short of brutal frankness on the part of some one or other would ever waken him to the truth.

His friend's blind unsuspicion sat heavily upon Clancy's heart. Had Simon been as other men, Terence felt — the mood of reaction being now strong upon him — that he could have confessed all and bowed to the storm. As it was, he felt half-dazed with conflicting emotions; at one moment his heart went out to this large-natured Quixote who had loaded him with obligations, at the next he hated his benefactor.

The tangled situation in which he found himself was like a cage of red-hot iron, scorching him every time he moved. There were but two exit doors available, two paths leading to restored self-respect; he must either renounce Nell, now that she was almost won, which was quite impossible; or he must now, this very night, in place

of completing the deed of assignment, renounce all Simon's gifts, and regain poverty and freedom at a stroke, which was all but impossible. For such wilful destruction of his own prospects would be a gross failure of duty to his family, by whom so much had been given up for Terence—the promising, the talented, the future lifter-up of a whole batch of young brothers and sisters from the mire of destitution. For him the urchin-flock had gone half clothed and unschooled, for him the mother had pinched and starved, the father had foregone the small savings wrung from the miserable bog-lands of his holding; to send him to Rugby and St. Bartholomew's crabbed maiden aunts had been propitiated, and grumbling uncles dunned to the yielding point.

And now at length Terence was in a position to restore that poor hungry home-party to comparative comfort. It needed so little to effect this; they had been bred up in so hard a school that a tenth part of the income derivable from this practice would be a little stream of wealth to that sordid home in the depths of County Cork.

Terence's father was a silent, broken-down sort of man, and perhaps by reason of his little speaking, his parting words dwelt the longer in his son's memory: "I know ye won't forget your mother and the little uns if ye ever make a big hit, Terence *agrah*, for 'tis a good heart ye have. But see that ye walk straight, me son, for ye've a bit of a weakness for tricksiness; play fair wid your friends, for ye'll make a crowd of them."

Then again, there was Nell herself to consider; could he desert her now after the innocent confession of her eyes and voice? Could he, after making happiness with her betrothed impossible— He had to drop one train of thought after another like red-hot irons; finding which, he grew reckless, as a weak man much pressed by circumstances will always do. Sign his acceptance of Simon's gift he must, were it only for the sake of his family—for the rest, things must drift on as they would. His intentions had always been for the best; it was no fault of his that this strange affinity had drawn him and sweet Nell together.

To drown thought, and from sheer desire to warm his heart towards the friend whom the baser part of him was trying to regard as an enemy, Terence drank a good deal of wine. As the fumes mounted, his hopes brightened; he saw all difficulties smoothed by some happy accident; he saw Nell released from Simon by the latter's own wish, without breach of honor or even propriety, and the little romance ending in happy tears and noble speeches all round.

By the time they rose from the table he had drunk twice as much as usual, and his excited feelings made him seem downright intoxicated.

Simon noticed this state of things with some disappointment. Yet as Terence warmed towards him, once more sentimentalized into a state at least colored by old friendship, he blamed his own hard judgment. He felt drawn by the very weakness of his friend, stirred, as often before, by that protecting kind of affection which a strong father has for a feeble son. "I must look after old Terence," he mused. "He only needs a little stiffening to be the best fellow alive. He shall never go astray for want of a friend, anyway."

"I think it is about time to go and meet Dr. Rose, and put the finishing touch to the legal business," he said, aloud, hoping to sober Terence and check further hospitality.

"Then come on, old chap," cried the other, taking Simon's arm to steady himself. "Come on, and I'll sign any damned thing you please. You've dragged me out of a morass of poverty; I'm a free man, I say, ready to meet my enemies in the gate with a high heart and a swelled purse! I don't care a damn for any one, old fellow. Simon, I love you again; I've been a cursed low mean fellow lately—never mind in what way; 'tis a relief to tell you the bare fact. Will you bear with me, old chap, and forgive me? God knows I wouldn't hurt a hair of your head! And you saved my life to-day, dear old lad; I was clean spent when you took me by the collar—couldn't have supported myself another two seconds."

"Come, Terence, you're talking wildly; pull yourself together or we must put off this business. You are over-excited, and too—"

"Too full of liquor, you might say, Simon; yet 'tisn't that altogether, 'tis intoxicated with returning self-respect I am. Ah, you don't know me, old fellow; I've been playing the part of a sneak and a cur lately—but never again, never again! You work upon me somehow without being aware of it, and now I'm a man again. Shake hands with me, now, and tell me I'm no cur?"

He finished with a half-sob, and Simon was lost in wonderment at this outburst. Yet Terence's eager desire to be friendly was plain enough, nor was it in Simon's nature to fail in answering warmth. He held out his hand without a word, letting his face speak for him; and they walked off together like brothers, with linked arms, to put the finishing touch to Simon's latest experiment in philanthropy.

CHAPTER XII

About the time Simon and Terence reached the lawyer's office, Kate Tredethlyn was for the first time in her life retiring to rest without saying good-night to her sister. There had been coolnesses between them, following naturally upon periods of heat, yet never until now a quarrel of pith enough to endure over bedtime. Nor had they quarrelled openly now. Indeed, Nell seemed too dazed and bewildered to be quite aware of her sister's exasperation. Ordinarily she would have rushed to her father the moment she was off her horse, and have poured forth a vivid account of the day's adventures. To-night she was silent as a mouse.

"What! my vigorous little Nell tired out with a gallop over the moor?" laughed the comfortable parson. He turned to Kate for an explanation of the phenomenon, but perceived at once that he would get none. Her brow was dark, her eyes sullen; her mood of a stormy type, well calculated to hinder the digestive process of a quiet man who has lately dined well, and incline him towards tobacco and the seclusion of his study.

Mr. Tredethlyn had always been rather afraid of his tall, handsome daughter, and was often conscious of a certain boyish elation when she was away on a visit, or for a day's picnicking. To-day, for example, had been full of peace and careless ease. When the girls rode off with Simon, their father was free to sit undisturbed among his roses, tranquilly reading the *Guardian;* after which he had been gently busy pasting some photographs of the Chilling Vale into an album. Luncheon, again, had to-day been invested with an atmosphere of pleasing bachelor-like repose, and his cook had surpassed herself in the matter of mutton cutlets—a weak point with her when she chanced to be out of temper. In fact, having no exacting Miss Kate to satisfy, she had been able to give the full force of her mind to these cutlets, and master's gratification had been a full return for her pains.

After lunch Mr. Tredethlyn had driven into Chillington, and spent a couple of comfortable gossipy hours at the club; nor could even Kate, whose silent criticism he often found so prickly, accuse her

father of idleness to-day, for had he not voluntarily called upon the overworked vicar, and undertaken the post of chairman at an approaching parish meeting? Mr. Tredethlyn was a popular man; liked, as one who never interfered with his neighbors; respected, as one who never did more work than he could help. It was as much a pleasure to himself as to his audience when he addressed the good folks of the town, for he was a good speaker, and his rich, genial voice and sly humor were full of good-living, good-nature, and wholesome human kindness.

He had proposed gaining a little credit with Kate by thus stepping in to relieve Mr. Nelson of a duty; but it was clear that nothing could please her to-night, that no recognition of his energy would be wrung from her by any means whatever; in brief, the one thing to do was to get out of her way.

"Better not sit talking with the girls this time," thought the sly parson; "but—let me see, Nell can stand my strong Havanas better than Kate; suppose I were to thicken the atmosphere of the study just up to Nell's power of endurance, and so secure myself against her sister? A well-smoked study is at once an intrenched camp unassailable by woman, and a hospital for the cure of nerves ravaged by past skirmishing with her. I shall smoke faster than they can eat, for better no Nell than both Kate and Nell."

Nell drifted into the intrenched camp presently, still drooping, languid, and quite unlike herself. She had been up-stairs to change her dress, yet was still in her riding-habit; her dark eyes had lost their sparkle, her ordinary brightness was quenched. But Mr. Tredethlyn failed to notice anything, having a full share of the self-concentration of his sex; to gain whose ear one needs not only to be very ill, but to proclaim the fact at the top of one's voice.

"Come and sit by me, little girl. You don't mind the smoke? Kate could hardly endure this atmosphere, I think—and hope," he added, with an inward chuckle.

"No, I don't mind the smoke, father."

"Well, you've had a pleasant day, of course, little Nell? How has our excellent, but too vigorous, Simon been spending his energies? Any new philanthropy afoot? I really believe that he and the vicar do a deal of harm between them; the place seems to be growing more discontented every day. However, Lord Timon, as his cousin calls him, is a fine fellow, dear; and, some day, I must e'en try to live up to my son-in-law. Was Terence Clancy with you this afternoon? I must get him to ride over again in a day or two, for

I'm not as well as I could wish. Dyspepsia, you know, undermines every pleasure. I do assure you that I'm so languid as to be unequal to the least exertion; why, the mere drive into the town quite tired me—and I made a poor luncheon, too. You young people, with never an ache or a care beyond your twopenny sentimental troubles, don't know what a painful process life can be!"

And so the good-natured, selfish father prosed on, while Nell sat, buried deep in an arm-chair, trying hard to listen, but finding every word drowned by the noise of her own thoughts.

Meanwhile, Kate had been crossing swords, or rather tongues, with two of the maids; but with little gain of relief from the process, since one gave her a month's warning on the spot, and the other was only waiting to follow suit as soon as the first flood of hysteria should abate. Later on she retired for the night without attempting an attack upon the study, more harassed in mind and temper than she had been for a long time.

It was a hot night, and she felt quite unable to sleep, indeed hardly made an effort to do so, having quite set her mind upon a visit from Nell. She felt that her sister's present stunned condition could not last many hours, that a torpid state so unnatural to Nell must needs end in a storm. Kate was eager for the storm; she had determined upon strong measures, and the more tempest the better.

The clock in the passage had struck the hours up to three o'clock, and now it was getting close upon four, but Kate never swerved from her expectant attitude. Nell would come; she felt as certain of it as that the sun would rise. And sure enough, just before the clock struck again, there was a pattering step in the passage, and Nell stole into the room.

"Are you awake, Kate?"

"Yes, wide awake."

Both voices were charged with the vague something that precludes any preliminary commonplaces; with both it was a case of silence or a plunge.

Nell sat down, with a heavy sigh, by the window. The stealing half-light of the coming dawn fell upon the black shower of her hair and the white folds of her long dressing-wrapper. Kate, sitting up in bed, awaiting with quickened pulse the coming outburst, felt rather than saw what was in her sister's face.

"I believe I am the most miserable woman in the world!" Hardly had Nell got the words out when she burst into a storm of sobs and tears.

"I'm glad you've come to your senses at last, Nell; and you may cry as hard as you please, for I'm a deal too angry to waste pity on you—in fact, I rather want to see you have a bad time than not."

"I don't want your pity; I'm too wretched for that to do any good, and I hate myself too much to accept pity from any one. Oh, Kate, I did think I was honest and true, if nothing else—it is a bitter thing to find one's self out to be such a poor creature, so fickle, so contemptible, so false. *False*, do you hear? I wouldn't have accused myself of that in my humblest mood. I did think I could trust myself—that I had the humble virtue of faithfulness. I don't know how this thing has come upon me; I have felt only dull and languid lately, but there has been a slow fever creeping through me, and now—"

"Now you've found yourself out to be mortal," said Kate, moodily, "and so liable to fever. It is not an uncommon discovery."

"Oh, I never knew, I never dreamed," cried Nell, blushing crimson and hiding her face. "I never dreamed until to-day that I was false; yet, when they were struggling in the water, I don't believe I gave Simon a thought. I have neither honor nor loyalty nor truth. Do you hear?"

"I am now certain of what I have often suspected"—Kate spoke with knitted brows and a kind of gloomy satisfaction—"namely, that Terence Clancy is no true man. He has meanly and cleverly taken advantage of your harassed state with regard to Simon. And I suppose a woman is weaker to resist an attack by one man, while vainly trying to love another, than under any other conditions. Had you broken with Simon, as I wished and advised; had you been free and happy, with the full use of your eyesight, I don't believe you would ever have looked twice at this too-modest, too-kind, too-subtle, too-treacherous—"

"You're utterly unjust to him, Kate. He is perfectly innocent; he has not the slightest suspicion of my weakness; he is simply a kind friend. You don't know him—oh, you don't know him; he's the very soul of honor!"

"Then honor's a poorer thing than I've been brought up to suppose. I'll tell you what I do think about him: he's a man of excellent intentions, soft heart, and double nature—the sort of man who does better as an instrument for spoiling another's happiness than any downright scoundrel. I say Terence is a good-hearted shuffler, a kind of innocent sneak—"

"Never dare to mention his name again!" Nell burst forth, white

with anger. "Never dare to traduce an honorable man in order to cover my weakness. If you mention him again, I leave the room!"

"I wouldn't indulge in heroics, Nell; they don't come well from one who proposes to become Mrs. Clancy, and to commence housekeeping on an income furnished by the man she has jilted."

Nell, who had been walking to and fro since the first mention of Clancy's name, sank down again with a gasp.

"Do you think I have sunk so low as that? You hit me hard, Kate. You don't spare me!"

"That was a brutal speech of mine. I'm sorry, little Nell."

"Never mind," said Nell, in a crushed sort of way; "I've given you the right to trample on me, and nothing matters much now."

"You really care for this man? The disease has struck root?"

"Care for him? Had honor permitted I could have been happy with him in the meanest cottage. I could—"

"There, there!" cried the other, fretfully; "for Heaven's sake let us stop at the cottage! Why can no one ever talk of love without dragging in that wretched Thatched Thing? I'm sick to death of it. Drop that mawkish stuff and answer this question—What do you intend to do?"

"You insult me by asking."

"Then I don't see how the conversation's to go on. I mustn't mention this spotless Irishman's name, and I mustn't ask you a question. It's hardly worth while keeping you out of bed to talk about the weather, is it?"

"Don't you know me well enough to guess my intention, Kate?"

"'Tis something quixotic, my dear, without doubt—something rather insane and desperately thorough, if I know you at all. You and Simon are lunatics both, or you'd have been comfortably married long ago. Are you going for a governess or a pupil-teacher, after first telling Simon that, though you don't care the flick of a whip for him except as a sister, you'll gush out with friendship for him as long as he lives, and nurse his children when another woman has made him happy? That's the usual or regulation treatment of the case, I believe."

"It's not the treatment suggested by common decency or rectitude, to my mind."

"Then out with your plan, my dear; don't fear to alarm me. The most gorgeous scheme coming from you won't dazzle me. Fling a rainbow at me and I sha'n't wink!"

"My plan is simple enough, Kate. I intend to keep my word. I'm pledged to Simon, and shall marry him as soon as he pleases."

"And how about the other hero of the piece—the one who is 'the soul of honor,' etc?"

Nell threw back her answer with a flash of eye and an angry gesture.

"I shall avoid him; I shall never see him, if I can possibly help it. Should he guess my weakness he would know how to assist me."

"I see."

"Would that I could trust myself as absolutely as I can him!"

"Just so."

"Kate, Kate, I'm very miserable; don't be hard with me. Do tell me that you think me capable of doing my duty to poor old Simon, and keeping this wretched secret to myself?"

"My dear child, I think you capable of anything, except what is commonplace or sensible or mean. But why not adopt some middle course? Let your engagement come to an end, then let us go abroad with one of the aunts, and stay there until both aspirants have cooled down and forgotten you. The thing's possible, I do assure you. As somebody in Shakespeare says: 'Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.'"

"Middle course? In questions of *honor* there's no such thing."

"There, there! you crush me with your aphorisms. I'm not going to beat the air any more; I'm not going to try and quench a conflagration of sentiment with a penny squirt of common-sense. Come in here beside me, Little Nell, and stay till getting-up time. We'll talk no more and quarrel no more. You'll just go your own way in this matter; I shall sneer a little behind your back now and then, and work off the rest of my temper on my father or the servants. I hate quarrelling with you, for you always apologize for my faults afterwards, and make me feel so abominably mean. Come into bed at once, or you'll catch your death of cold and get laid up; and then I shall have to nurse and be kind to you and bottle up my wrath, instead of giving you the shaking you deserve."

CHAPTER XIII

KATE and her father breakfasted together next morning, Nell having caught a slight chill at the picnic yesterday, as her sister explained, and being in bed with a headache in consequence. There was an odor of improbability about this statement; but Kate had no inventive skill worth mentioning, and it served her purpose well enough, since Mr. Tredethlyn was himself an invalid this morning, with mind fully occupied by his own woes. He had exerted himself a good deal in the garden yesterday, and so got over-heated, and the subsequent chill had flown to his liver. Whether the extra glass or two of Madeira with which he had celebrated his bachelor holiday had increased the chill was a point for private reflection. At any rate, the deep gloom of torpid liver was upon him, and breakfast a mere empty form. He thrust aside his untasted salmon-peal, packed for him with especial care by Nell the moment it left its native Culmer yesterday, and sighed the deep sigh of the dyspeptic.

"Kate, my dear, I feel wretchedly unwell this morning. I believe I shall have to send for that bright fellow Terence Clancy again."

Her father's distempers always produced a contemptuous irritation in Kate; but the threat to summon Terence was at this juncture a positive outrage.

"I do wish, father"—she tried to steady her voice, but the temper *would* get into it—"I do wish you would put yourself into the hands of some other doctor. Are you so very unwell this morning?"

This was a bad stroke. Nothing could have been better calculated to arouse his opposition than this simple question; for even a good-natured parson is not to be managed by scoffing at his bodily trials. The genial, ruddy face became sullen; its owner relapsed into silence.

"I do not believe he is more skilful than the other doctors; and —and you would really do me a great favor by going back to Doctor Rose?"

"He is leaving off practice—as you know perfectly well. I sup-

pose you would like me to do without medical attendance altogether?"

"Why not try Mr. Syme? People are beginning to think better of him, I hear."

No answer. Her father had assumed the dignified silence of injured innocence. Kate's indifference to his state of health was a grievance of long standing.

She quickly regretted her want of self-control. It was of real importance to keep Terence out of the house for a time. Already, as she had been duly informed, some of the gossips of Chillington had been coupling his name with her sister's, and the report gave a deep stab to her family pride. She had vexed her father now, and must give up the topic for an hour or two; but she was resolved to recur to it again and again, to fight tooth and nail to keep Nell's name from slander.

A long silence ensued; then both were relieved by the appearance of Mrs. French-Chichester driving rapidly round the sweep in her high dog-cart. Kate hastened to the French window to greet the welcome visitor. Mr. Tredethlyn's smile broke out again as the widow nodded her cheerful good-mornings.

Mrs. French-Chichester was in her brightest mood; she seemed to disperse the sullen atmosphere of the room as a breeze the moorland fog.

"What! no little Nell?" she exclaimed as she sat down. "What does this mean?"

"She is in bed with a bad headache."

The widow smiled at Kate's crude simplicity, muttering, "Her very voice shows that something is wrong."

"Tut, tut, child!" cried the visitor, arranging her fringe with coquettish glances at the looking-glass, in which Kate's face was also reflected. "Nell with the megrims? I never heard of such a thing. Send up my love, and tell her she must come down immediately."

"I think she caught a chill yesterday."

"Kate, Kate, you can't do it!" laughed the widow inwardly. "Chill and headache, indeed! I could have thought of something better at ten years old!"

"These girls don't know what headache means," sighed Mr. Tredethlyn. "When they come to our age, now—"

"Oh, how dare you, Mr. Tredethlyn!"

"I *beg* your pardon—I meant my age. As for you, I only wish they were half as young."

"Thank you; that's very pretty. Well, Nell's headache must be cured by to-night, or I shall scold her dreadfully."

"She'll be well enough if there's any fun going forward," laughed the large parson, sinking back in an arm-chair. "These girls are full of whims and fancies. Now, I wonder if you could make a guess at Kate's last fad?"

"I haven't a notion. Has she discovered a flaw in some bosom friend's pedigree, and so been compelled to cut her acquaintance?"

"Why, she has taken a sudden dislike to your protégé, Terence Clancy, and wants me to drop him."

The widow's pale quick eyes fell; fearing to betray herself, she turned to the glass again. Poor Kate! It was too naïvely delicious to hear her father bawling out the family secret thus! There was Kate, crimson with vexation, making signs to him, while he poured out Terence's praises, intermixed with appeals to the visitor for corroboration.

"Never dare to disparage my 'pretty boy' Terence again!" cried the widow, after superadding her praises to those of Mr. Tredethlyn. "Never hint at such a thing," she insisted, shaking her head at Kate, and showing her gleaming teeth, "or I shall believe you are in love with him!"

Poor Kate, with her hands tied by the dread of exposing Nell, was quite beaten flat between the pair.

"And now that I've scolded you well, my dear," the lively woman resumed, "I'm going to turn suppliant, and entreat your assistance to-night. I have three new men staying with me unexpectedly—two hussar cousins and a fast young barrister, and amuse them I must, by hook or by crook. Besides, I have boasted so much about the belles of our neighborhood that, merely to preserve my credit, you and Nell must come and dine to-night. I've got a few people together at a moment's notice, so pray don't make difficulties. And I have asked Simon" (the speaker forgot to mention that he had refused), "and Captain Rush, and the Bulteel girls, and a few others."

Kate hesitated.

"Your pet aversion, my 'pretty boy,' hasn't been asked, so don't be alarmed."

Kate accepted forthwith, with a sigh of relief. The visitor enjoyed another inward laugh. But straightforward Kate was presently to deal her shrewd adversary a facer calculated to astonish her not a little. Just as her visitor rose to go, she exclaimed quite simply, as though innocent of giving any but the best news:

"By-the-bye, father, I have a strong impression that we shall lose Nell rather sooner than we have anticipated. Simon is to ride over after lunch, and I verily believe they intend to discuss no less a question than the wedding-day."

Kate was quite proud of the matter-of-course way in which she delivered this; not a soul, she considered, could possibly suspect her of any special anxiety on Nell's behalf.

Mrs. French-Chichester winced under the stroke for one moment, but recovered herself the next. She guessed precisely what had happened, and that there was a likelihood of Terence's very success proving fatal. He had, in fact, won a dangerous victory, thereby exposing to Nell the state of her heart; and instead of surrendering, as an ordinary rational girl would have done, she must needs turn heroic, and, like a British army, only begin to show her real mettle when well beaten. The shrewd critic felt that she had not allowed quite enough for this same old-fashioned romanticism of Nell's; but if she had been taking things too easily lately, she saw her error clearly enough now, and fully meant to have her own way in spite of it. For her interests were nearly concerned in this question of Simon and Nell; and her will, once braced up to a given course, seldom failed to bend circumstances accordingly.

"I'm so glad you're here this morning," Kate continued, "for you'll join me in persuading my father to give Nell leave of absence. You, at any rate, will understand how absolutely necessary it will be for her to go up to town about her trousseau as soon as the day is settled?"

"Gracious, child, you quite take my breath away! Do you mean to say that Simon has actually screwed himself up to the point of asking to have the great day fixed? I thought our Arcadian pair would have been billing away for at least another year before that. Is there a brief lull in his schemes, or does he propose to turn Monks Damerel into, say a home for inebriates, and require Nell's services as head matron? Mr. Tredethlyn, what do you say to having your Nell snatched away in this ruthless manner?"

Mr. Tredethlyn's looks answered for him; his ruddy face had actually paled at Kate's announcement. To lose Nell? He had not half made up his mind to such a sacrifice, for another year at least. Nell was a necessity of his existence, the very light of his eyes. His mingled horror and bewilderment caused the visitor to bubble over with laughter, in which Kate joined more from excitement than mirth.

"Come, come, Kate, how can you have the heart to throw an in-

dulgent parent into such a state; you, who want to deprive him of his doctor, too? Really, this is a most unnatural and cynical age. Mr. Tredethlyn, I must positively come to your rescue in this strait. We're not going to have Nell snatched away in this bandit fashion, are we? with a hole-and-corner wedding, and a jerry-built trousseau? No, no; our little beauty is not to be surrendered in this off-hand fashion. We must have due notice—six months, at least, I should stand out for—and then a grand wedding with proper alarums and excursions. You must put your foot down for once, and I'll support you through thick and thin. I shall manage to talk over Nell to-night, and insure you some reprieve. Meanwhile, let Simon start a lunatic asylum to keep himself quiet. Well, I really must be off now, as poor Miss Sherringham will be looking for me. Six months, mind—and no surrender!"

In two minutes Mrs. French-Chichester was rattling down the drive, and had disappeared round the corner of the laurels.

She drove straight to the house of Miss Sherringham, an invalid friend who lived in the town. She was generally understood to be very kind and attentive to this old friend, and thus earned a good deal of praise on rather slight grounds. To-day's visit was brief and characteristic; that is to say, she rattled away for some ten minutes, hardly allowing the invalid to get in a word. She was dreadfully busy, was pulled this way and that with her calls and duties and shoppings, and quite grieved that she could spare poor Amy so few minutes. Meanwhile Amy's trained nurse remained grimly silent in the background. Having opportunities not open to the public of estimating the real worth of this popular great lady, the nurse was quite aware that this friend, who was generally supposed to be so kind and attentive to the poor old invalid, was a grasping, unscrupulous woman, whose friendship hinged upon the main chance. Even the presents that came from Hollacomb Manor—the flowers, grapes, etc.—were showy rather than substantial, designed to impress visitors rather than add to the invalid's comfort.

"And now for Terence," thought the keen widow, the ten minutes due to friendship being punctually discharged. She drove rapidly up the hill, and was relieved, on inquiring at the White House, to find Mr. Clancy at home.

"Terence," she began, the moment he came into the room, with a friendliness which, coming from a *grande dame* to a humble doctor, was somewhat intoxicating, "if I send my cart away, could you spare me half an hour, and drive me home afterwards?"

Certainly he could, with the greatest pleasure. He was quite thrilled by this flattering attention, as was natural enough. She thereupon sent off her servant with the dog-cart, hoisted her sunshade, and strolled down the steep garden with her gratified host.

There was a path half buried in bushes at the bottom of the slope, which would serve very well for a quiet tête-à-tête; and in this secluded spot the good-natured woman, with many kind smiles and delicate strokes of flattery, opened her mind to Terence Clancy.

As the stately widow swept along in her dainty morning costume, with her grand air of genial superiority, Terence felt quite dominated by her. Never a conceited man, he asked himself, "Who am I, that this important personage, merely to bow to whom in the High Street is a kind of distinction, should thus treat me as a friend—from pure good feeling, too?"

She had always been kind to him—a nameless, penniless, young general practitioner; and now, just when he was entangled in a most difficult, most delicate situation, when he knew not which way to turn, she had come to his rescue unasked. There was no difficulty in gaining Terence's confidence. Harassed as he was, it was an immense relief to him to pour forth his troubles freely. It lightened his heart and conscience to explain to this sympathetic listener how he had been imperceptibly drawn towards Nell Tredethlyn, lured on bit by bit by circumstances until, before he could half realize what had happened, he found himself in his present dishonorable position. His listener had the less difficulty in comprehending the position since the whole story was stale news to her, and the situation itself in some measure her own handiwork. But she encouraged him to pour it all forth, saying, "It will do you good Terence, and I'll tell you what I think about it presently." She saw that his distress was genuine, that she must needs ease his mind and conscience as a first step towards gaining her end. She understood him the better from having a genuine liking for the bright young Irishman; for, unlike most of her friendships, this one had increased with intimacy. In truth, this strong, hard woman, had a quasi-motherly affection for the weak, soft-hearted man, and was really anxious for his happiness.

"Terence," she said, presently, her white ungloved hand resting upon his arm, "I tell you frankly that I came to see you on Nell's account as well as your own. Do you know that the date of her wedding is very likely being discussed at this moment while we

talk? That the event will probably take place, if no steps are taken to save her, in a few weeks?"

"I knew it," groaned Terence; "I knew he had been asking her to fix the day. And she must consent; if not now, in a day or two."

"Yes; if no one cares for her enough to come to her rescue."

"I fear that's impossible. She and I are both bound hand and foot by chains of honor—"

"Forged by your own morbid inner consciousness, Terence. Good heavens! is a girl to be bound forever because she once gave a reluctant consent to a man whom time has shown that she can't care for? Pshaw! I've no patience with that sort of canting trash."

"Ah, but look at my obligations to him! He has raised me from—"

"Yes, yes, I know all about it. Haven't I had fables of Simon's generosity dinned into my ears any time these five years? I know well enough that he can be tolerably generous with his father's money; most men can. But I never heard of his stinting *himself* much. That precious observatory of his cost thousands—and of what earthly use is it? Professional astronomers have done all there is to be done long ago, and how much the better are we for their work? Look you, Terence, if you'd keep friends with me, don't harp on Simon's cheap benevolence; the subject always spoils my temper. Now, I believe your only real obstacle, the thing that really sticks in your throat, is Simon's loan or gift?"

"That most of all, certainly."

"Then listen; and don't interrupt me. He shall transfer the debt to me. I will be your creditor for a few years, when you will easily repay me. Will that unloose your chain, or are you quite determined to spoil Nell's life and your own from sheer mawkish sentiment? *She'll* sacrifice herself, be very sure of that, touched as she is with some of Simon's lunacy. Her fate is in your hands. You can make her intensely happy, load her with love and care, make every hour of her life worth living, or you can bind her fast to a man whom her very bondage will quickly teach her to hate. These two courses are open to you, and if you're not man enough to choose the right one, why, you're not the good-hearted Terence Clancy upon whom I have pinned my faith!"

The speaker was wrought up to an emotional pitch, which surprised Terence not a little; nor could he quite disguise from himself that what stirred her most was not so much affection for Nell as

hatred of her cousin Simon. He had always suspected this, her good-natured gibes at Simon having an invariable thread of spite running through them; but now for the first time this hatred had poured itself out unchecked. He wished only to see a kind friend helping him, but he saw, too, Simon's enemy tempting him. Still, the pressure on his conscience was lessened; the monetary obligation might be removed—there, at least, was immense relief.

Terence turned to his companion, glowing with gratitude and renewed hope; she read her victory in his swimming eyes. A little more flattery, a dose or two more of sophistry, and he would be hers. Her quick mind ran over the chances of the coming campaign, the forces she proposed to array, the opportunities to contrive. Already the ardor of the combat possessed her strongly. She felt herself pitted against Simon, and with all the odds in her favor, yet the issue well spiced with uncertainty.

CHAPTER XIV

A PARTY at Hollacomb Manor had all the surprise possibilities of a child's bran pie. No one ever felt sure as to what would come of an invitation from Mrs. French-Chichester, whether a staid hyper-English evening in the drawing-room, with a quiet rubber, a little music, and the carriages at eleven sharp; or the liveliest of dinners followed by pool and "long drinks" in the billiard-room afterwards. The widow prided herself upon her faculty, sharpened by years of experience at rapid Indian stations, of entertaining all sorts and conditions of people—even to those unspeakable bores her county neighbors—though after a party of this complexion she generally found it necessary to run up to town for a day or two by way of relieving the consequent depression. Some people looked grave about the Hollacomb entertainments, but she had a reputation for such good-nature and cleverness, and, moreover, entertained such very big people at times, that the murmurs against her were apt to be quickly drowned in the general chorus of praise. You might meet Lord Bridistow, the reigning peer of the neighborhood, in her drawing-room, with the Bishop of Extaple, and other such magnates; or you might find yourself in a room full of country curates and their wives, for the best-dressed woman in the district, as the widow rightly conceived herself to be, liked well to queen it among "the dowdies," as she called them.

As for the young people, not one of them ever came amiss to this genial hostess. No young woman with the least prettiness or charm about her, no young man with a single word to say for himself, ever failed of a welcome at Hollacomb. Her genuine good-nature in this respect, and love of seeing young people happy, were good points about this rather faulty Lady Bountiful, and had the effect of making the manor-house a genuine forcing-house for young romance, where flirtation ripened into engagement with almost breathless celerity.

Upon entering the drawing-room this evening Kate perceived at once that the party was of a lively order; Mrs. French-Chichester's sparkle and vivacity being alone sufficient to indicate the style of

her guests. In fact, she wore the peculiarly audacious smile which only appeared in the bracing society of fast people. She greeted Kate with effusion, overwhelming her with thanks for taking pity on her destitution at such short notice. Her two cousins, the Plungers, hovered about during these preliminary greetings and were speedily introduced; as also was the fast young barrister, who looked so uncommonly rapid, not to say rakish, as to make the brace of subalterns seem quite callow and Arcadian. Kate decided to hate the man before he had quite finished his bow. The moment afterwards she caught sight of Terence Clancy, and her hostess whispered, "So sorry, dear, but I *had* to ask Terence, after all; one of my hussars was at Rugby with him, and I really couldn't omit him without awkward explanation."

This rapid aside was overheard by Captain Rush, who passed close to the pair at this moment, and it gave him the key to Kate's anxious looks. It was clear that she had fallen into the same suspicious groove as himself, that she feared Terence Clancy. He presently made an opportunity for pumping young Macdonald, one of the subalterns, which was easily done, since the barrister was monopolizing Miss Tredethlyn, while their hostess kept Nell under lock and key, so to say, turning a blank eye upon the most appealing glances of her young cousins. That ill-used pair presently fell back, exchanging a scowl, and were pleased to receive Rush with civility. Kate observed that they were even deferential to him, and thus had ocular proof of what she had often heard, viz.—that he was a man of some note in his profession.

In point of fact, Kate had a great desire for Captain Rush's help and sympathy this evening; for Nell had carried out her resolution, and actually fixed the date of her wedding-day, and her present self-sacrificial condition might well be a dangerous one. Indeed, now that she thought herself completely mistress of her weakness, fairly launched upon the path of renunciation, her resisting power was probably at its weakest; nor was Terence one to throw away a chance from dulness of perception. But Rush, thoroughly offended by her treatment of his father on the day of the picnic, declined even to look at Miss Tredethlyn this evening, and there was no one else to befriend her.

Julius Rush, with the usual success of a taciturn man when it pleases him to exert himself, easily drew out the beardless Plungers, learning incidentally that one had been at Haileybury, the other at Eton, so that neither had ever seen Clancy before this evening. By

the direction of their glances Kate guessed that the Irishman was the subject of their talk, and was tortured with anxious curiosity. She looked almost imploringly at Captain Rush, caught his eye, and bowed; but no use, he returned her bow stiffly, without the faintest symptom of any intention to do more.

At dinner Kate's uneasiness was not soothed by seeing Clancy placed exactly opposite her sister, and shining with even more than his usual brilliance. Half the table was listening to him; he seemed doing his utmost to surpass himself, and Kate clearly detected a sort of forlorn-hope recklessness in the frequent glances he bestowed upon Nell. Meanwhile her next-door neighbor, the fast barrister, poured upon Miss Tredethlyn a flood of fashionable talk which in her present fretted condition was a mere waste of intellect.

It was with a sigh of genuine relief that Kate—at the end of long hours, as it seemed—perceived Mrs. French-Chichester's signal, and found herself in the drawing-room with Nell safe under her wing. Afterwards Captain Rush would help her; surely he would relent and be friendly again, when, under her direction, he might be of real service by fastening himself to Clancy for the rest of the evening. Kate was in a mood to respect him highly to-night: he seemed to be the only man present with any real weight and solidity about him; and somehow his mortifying indifference to herself raised him in her esteem.

As soon as the gentlemen came in Captain Rush marched straight past Kate's chair, and was at once absorbed by two eager Miss Bulteels. Then, by way of putting a finishing touch to her vexation, Terence Clancy took possession of Nell with the air of one who captures a prize and means to keep it.

From that moment Kate was no better than a helpless spectator. She was skilfully entangled first in one group, then in another—by her resourceful hostess, and soon lost sight of Nell and Terence altogether.

Terence's heart beat high when he found himself in a shrubbery walk with Nell beside him. Other people were traversing the garden paths, but he knew where lay the best chance of escaping prying eyes, and Nell made no difficulty in going where he chose. Flushed as he was with wine and excitement, this compliance of hers elated him still further. His remaining scruples had been blown away like dust by Mrs. French-Chichester's specious arguments and promises; he was now fully resolved upon fighting for Nell with all the skill, resource, and energy he possessed.

She was paler than usual. Her pure profile looked almost white against the bosky darkness of the shrubberies. Terence looked down at her with his heart in his eyes and a whirling brain. "Oh, Nell," he said, in a shaky whisper, "what a bitter, hard world it is! Why must everything go wrong?"

Nell showed no resentment at being addressed thus. Her Christian name seemed to belong naturally to the moment, to be a part of the solemn intensity of this, her parting scene with Terence—for such she intended to make it.

"Yes, there are hard things," she acquiesced, in a voice much firmer than his; "yet there's a keen satisfaction in just doing one's duty, isn't there?"

She accepted his meaning frankly, then? He might have foretold as much; no mock modesty or pretence of blindness would be possible with Nell. Her tone said, plainly, "Of course we are both miserable, and must be, for duty demands it."

Terence felt this to be an ominous beginning, and had a chill perception that her very willingness to be alone with him, the suppressed excitement of her manner all the evening, and other symptoms upon which he had been building a handsome edifice of hope, should really have been read as danger signals. Yet this first note of opposition only intensified his stubborn resolve to conquer. If she was, as he now perceived, in the very wrath and ecstasy of renunciation, why, he was possessed as vehemently by quite another passion.

"You think, then, that conventional propriety should override any such trifle as the happiness of two lives?"

"Yes, when propriety is synonymous with honor."

"Honor?" he repeated, wrathfully. "Honor's the most deadly fetich ever set up by human folly, and causes more misery even than poverty or ill-health!"

She looked at him pityingly. Such a sentiment coming from him—the soul of honor—was indeed confirmation of how much he had suffered.

"That is not like you, Terence," she said, gently.

That "Terence," coming softly from her, backed by the glance which told far more than she imagined, helped to madden him. Without caring who listened or what might be the consequence, he gave voice to the burning appeal that had been upon the tip of his tongue for weeks.

"Nell, Nell, *I love you!* For months I have been tortured with this, and speak I will! What has honor to do with it? How could

I tell that this fever would come upon me? It possessed me before I was half aware of any danger. You know it well enough; you know I never dreamed of injuring my friend. You've led me on without knowing it; you've robbed me of my happiness! Is a man dishonorable for being robbed? Nell, there has been no fault on either side, but only *nature.* You never cared for him, and can never give him any real happiness, though by clinging to him you can make us all three miserable for life. Nell, I will tell him the whole story and appeal to him, and he'll set you free. I'll give back his gift, and we'll go away together; and I'll work for you, I'll slave to make a happy home for my beautiful Nell, and surround her with love and sunshine."

Not until this moment had Nell known the overwhelming possibilities of temptation. Every burning word he had said seemed true. No fault—no fault anywhere—and nothing but wretchedness before them both. Flushed by her evident weakness, Terence stooped suddenly and kissed her lips, and so released her at a touch. Crimson with shame, she thrust him back.

"Never dare to speak to me again!" she panted, with flaming eyes.

He shrank back, his eyes full of woman's tears.

"Never speak to you again, Nell? You've robbed me of heart and soul and will; you've made me half-mad by leading me on to love you, and now you leave me to groan through life alone. I wish to God I had never met you!"

With that he turned and fled through the bushes, out at the shrubbery gate, through the meadows beyond, and into the Hollacomb Woods. Downward he plunged, with brain on fire, until he found himself by the Chilling stream, then flung himself upon a flat bowlder, plunging head and face into the cool bright water.

It was like Terence to begin with over-confidence and end by giving up hope at the first serious rebuff; still more like him was the mood of intense self-pity into which he plunged as soon as the first rage of his disappointment abated. With what a sickening irony Fate always chose to treat him! No sooner was the sordid struggle against material circumstances over, the hard grip of poverty relaxed, than he was compelled to endure the pangs of disprized love; and the knowledge that Nell cared for him, longed for him, was crushing her own hopes as well as his, was like a poison in his blood. His oddly mixed feeling towards Simon, compounded lately of gratitude and jealousy, friendship and malignant envy, was settling into

downright hatred of a successful rival. Impossible not to hate a man who had snatched happiness from him, bound him with fetters of intolerable kindness. How little those fetters had hindered the action of his tongue when he poured his eloquence upon Nell just now Terence never reflected; the memory of a man acting as counsel for himself being a water-tight receptacle for evidence in his own favor, a sieve for all besides. He only felt that through this pernicious benefactor—a man all kindness on the surface, all rank selfishness within—Fate had been playing skittles with him, setting him up square and firm one moment, just for the pleasure of knocking him flat the next. Between the gusts of self-pity came the weak man's longing for consolation. His thoughts turned naturally to the only person who had any real sympathy for him—to pretty Mary Pethick, whom he had not seen for so long. Her timid admiration, he felt, her innocent worship from a distance, would soothe and comfort him, weighed down as he was by undeserved misfortune. He must see her again soon—to-morrow, if possible; or why not to-night? He looked at his watch; it was barely half-past ten. She would as likely as not be walking home along the canal at this hour, as she was wont to leave the town about ten o'clock. At any rate, it was worth a climb up to the canal on the chance of getting a glimpse of her; so without more ado he struck into a path which led upward from the river.

CHAPTER XV

It chanced one morning, some three weeks after a certain scene at Hollacomb Manor, that Nell Tredethlyn had an unexpected meeting with the man whom she had resolved to treat as a stranger during the remainder of her natural life.

She had seen nothing of Terence since her dismissal of him at Hollacomb, and had spent the intervening period in trying to drive him clean out of her mind, sometimes even attaining that end for, perhaps, an hour at a time. Unfortunately for Nell's peace and comfort she had not been allowed to pay her proposed visit to London. Sir Hamo had put his veto upon it, and had lately become so peevish and fractious that, for Simon's sake, who had to bear the brunt of his father's irritation, Nell had foregone her scheme; and Kate was now staying with the London aunts and conducting the important campaign of the trousseau in her sister's place. Thus Sir Hamo's fondness for Nell, which seemed rather to increase with his declining health, tied her to a neighborhood from which she would very gladly have been absent at this period. It also made possible the above-mentioned meeting with Terence Clancy.

Nell was strolling down to the lodge gate after breakfast that morning, and came upon Terence suddenly, just as she emerged from the laurelled path. She was fluttered and upset by the unexpected encounter; but, collecting her forces, gave him a cool nod, and a glance containing not the least decimal fraction of a welcome.

Terence Clancy stood before her humbly, as a subject before his queen, not daring to raise his eyes to hers. No man could look more supplicating than he, nor could any show a woman more tender deference with voice or bearing. And with Nell he could not well be too humble, as he knew. His one chance of forgiveness lay through her pity.

And Terence meant to be forgiven—he had come for that purpose; and now that her rich beauty was once more before his eyes, while she herself seemed further removed from him than ever, his desire to gain her seemed to increase tenfold. Without raising his

eyes he could see how her hands trembled, and he was far from feeling as hopeless as he looked.

"I must apologize," he began, with a certain proud humility, "for appearing before you at all; but Mr. Tredethlyn asked me here this morning, and I hardly liked to refuse." At this point he caught a glimpse of the mounting color that she was trying to keep down.

"If you wish it, however, I will decline to attend Mr. Tredethlyn any more. Such a step must of course injure my prospects; but I don't care for that, though it does hurt me to make so bad a return for your father's kindness."

"I don't want to injure your prospects," she said, stiffly. Then in a burst characteristic enough in its innocent exposition of her secret, "I feel that you *ought not to be here.*"

Sly Terence waxed more humble than before.

"I see that you can't bring yourself to forgive me," he sighed, "and I don't complain. I forgot myself for one moment, and so have sacrificed your friendship for life. Well, I shall always be a lonely man and—and nothing matters much now."

"But I hope you will be very successful and happy; that you have a career before you."

"Happy?" He smiled sadly; his blue eyes were swimming as they met hers for a moment.

Poor Nell was harassed and puzzled. She knew quite well that she had forgiven him already—far too soon, as she admitted to herself—and it seemed hypocritical, if not unkind, to persist in hostility towards so humble a penitent. But then there was her duty to Simon; and yet again, entangled therewith, was the duty she owed her father. Mr. Tredethlyn would be vexed—perhaps seriously offended—at this mysterious withdrawal of Terence Clancy's professional services, and would talk about it; and people might suspect that Nell cared too much for the brilliant young doctor. And surely, surely her first duty to Simon was to guard this painful secret. She turned doubtfully towards the house, Terence walking meekly at her side, but inwardly full of flattering hopes.

As they crossed the gravel sweep Mr. Tredethlyn came out to meet them.

In the comfortable parson's manner there was a hint of something like awkwardness, though he greeted Terence cordially as usual. In point of fact, Mrs. French-Chichester had a day or two ago made a suggestion quite in accordance with her usual good sense and sym-

pathetic appreciation of his digestive troubles, and which commended itself highly to Mr. Tredethlyn. Yet, now that the moment for carrying it out had arrived, he felt slightly embarrassed. It had occurred to her that Terence Clancy might be asked to spend a week or two up at Moor Gates, and so be in a position to thoroughly study his patient, and perhaps to effect a permanent cure of his liver malady. This might easily be managed, since Terence had not yet definitely commenced practice in the town, his present duties being confined to riding round the country to pay a few distant visits.

For the next few weeks, until the new fittings of his surgery were completed, and the new stock of drugs got in, he would probably have nearly half of every day to himself.

The suggested arrangement seemed to Mr. Tredethlyn to be full of comfort and symmetry. He pictured himself strolling about the garden of an evening, spreading out before Terence each troublesome symptom in turn, and drinking in the clever doctor's hints thereupon. But there was one obstacle to be got over; there was Nell to propitiate. Fortunately Kate was away, or the scheme would have been hopeless; unfortunately, however, Nell had also taken to avoiding Dr. Clancy, doubtless reflecting the color of her sister's prejudice, and might now be expected to make objections. Hence the simplest, as also the shrewdest, plan would be to give the invitation in Nell's presence, and so compel her to second it.

Mr. Tredethlyn began at once to question Terence as to his work, drew from him with bland cunning the admission of his freedom during so many hours of the day, and then clapped roundly into the invitation in a manner that quite took Nell's breath away.

Terence shot one imploring glance at her; then refused, with obviously wistful regret. The refusal at once clinched Mr. Tredethlyn's resolution. He pressed the young Irishman kindly and insistently, then sent him into the garden to think further about it, explaining that he had a letter to finish himself, and would rejoin them shortly. Nell, pale and palpitating, was thus left alone with Terence to confront this awkward situation.

"Do not be alarmed," he said, proudly, but with sorrow underlying pride; "I shall stick to my refusal, although — although *nothing;* I shall stick to it through thick and thin."

"I am sorry," Nell rejoined, with difficult steadiness.

He seemed so generous and noble, so ready to sacrifice himself, that it was very painful to have to dismiss him thus; nor had Nell

any fear of herself now, feeling, as she did, so braced up for duty, so sternly and invincibly loyal. She was about to dismiss Terence for his own sake alone — and thereby injure him with her father! Mr. Tredethlyn, for all his bland good-nature, was thoroughly accustomed to having his own way, and quite capable of calling in another doctor if Terence chanced to offend him; and one seceding patient is apt to draw others after him. Once more, there was Simon to be considered. What would he think when Mr. Tredethlyn told him, as would certainly be the case, how Nell had chilled Terence into refusing this invitation? Would not even Simon's suspicions be aroused?

Thus was poor Nell mentally driven hither and thither, until she could hardly think coherently, the while Terence walked sadly by her without speaking a word, well knowing that for once silence was the best eloquence.

In a few minutes Mr. Tredethlyn rejoined them, and on further pressure from him Terence cast a glance of such penetrating appeal at Nell that she looked a half-assent in reply — and the thing was done.

Nell had now allowed temptation to close with her, and was in for a bitter wrestle.

For this last move of Mrs. French-Chichester's was a passing shrewd one. She had felt baffled lately, and angry with Terence for his continued neglect of his opportunities; having conceived him to be a man of spirit, she now found him a tame, nerveless fellow.

But, in point of fact, this acute tactician had not yet fathomed half the deeps and shallows, the eddies and backwaters of Terence's character; it had not once occurred to her, for instance, that, while apparently overcome with disappointment, he might have been consoling himself with another piece of love-making. At any rate, she had now provided him with a last chance of showing his mettle— if he had any.

At first all was deceitful calm. Terence took up his quarters at Moor Gates, and spent most of the first day on his rounds; then followed the quiet half-hour's medical talk in the garden to which Mr. Tredethlyn had been looking forward with so much ardor. Afterwards, Simon came over to dinner and made Nell and Terence sing duets to him for the best part of the evening; and finally Terence drove back with his friend to spend an hour or two in the observatory, where Simon, having undertaken some rather elaborate

astronomical work for an old Cambridge friend, was very busy just now.

The first day having passed in this innocent decorous fashion, Nell breathed more freely. She began to think she had exaggerated her own danger, still more so Terence's. Why should not Simon's close friend be her own as well? She was already beginning to look upon Terence as a brother; and surely she could not be so culpably weak or foolish as to be unable to train her heart in this safe direction. She remembered some words from *Middlemarch* which filled her with comfort, which she could dwell upon and use as a kind of anodyne: "We can keep a guard upon our constancy and our affections as we do upon our other treasures." She thought to nail her constancy and her affection to Simon as one nails fruit-trees to a wall; and always walked about hammer and knife in hand, so to say, driving in a nail here, lopping off an offending twig there. Terence helped her constantly, showing his penitence in a hundred little ways. True, he showed his devotion also, but he evidently strove to subdue this; and the devotion was quite hopeless, therefore harmless. She recognized it as the unspoken love of an honorable loyal man, who had once in a moment of passion forgotten his duty to his friend; and whose guard upon himself was the stricter for past remissness. Meanwhile, Mr. Tredethlyn recognized only a bright, open-hearted young friend, who possessed the double excellence of listening patiently and treating the liver with effect.

Thus was Nell lulled into the security that breeds carelessness. She ceased to watch herself severely, allowed the sweetness of the hour to intoxicate her senses until she was like one under the influence of a drug. The summer was at its height, the August sun blazed upon moor and garden, upon meadow and stream and lustrous woodland; the day was full of subtle happiness, the even-tide a poem, the twilight a vague sweet dream. Simon's frequent presence, his brotherly affection for Terence, his unruffled calm, all helped to drown self-suspicion. Nell held his face to be a supreme proof that all things were well, and the sophistry of love wove a net-work over the dangerous ground across which she was picking her way.

Every morning Simon would drive her over to see his invalid father; every afternoon be with her for some hours at Moor Gates, only leaving for his observatory when darkness set in. And then? Then Nell and her father would saunter in the cool air with their

guest—or Mr. Tredethlyn would despatch the young people out-of-doors while he dozed over a book in his study. On these occasions Terence would speak mournfully of the struggle he had gone through, of the lonely life to which he was looking forward; of how, but for the tie of gratitude to Simon, he would throw up his practice and go to seek his fortune in distant lands, where hardship and danger might help a man to forget his misery—and Nell's melting eyes would rest upon him sorrowfully, as she gave ear to the sad story.

So passed the week. At the end of it Mr. Tredethlyn entreated Terence to remain just one week more, and this time he accepted without looking to Nell for permission. He was madly in love with her now, and knew not how to tear himself away. He knew that there was a crash imminent; the dread of it was ever present with him, yet he would not voluntarily lose a single hour of Nell's company, nor relinquish what hope he had of ultimately detaching her from Simon.

But now at length Nell awoke to the consciousness of her extreme danger, and with her awakening the struggle entered upon a new phase. Sophistry had said its say, and given place to plain actuality; she could pretend to herself no longer. She was thinking neither of Simon's happiness, nor of what people might say, nor of Terence's prospects; but only, with a sick dread, of the coming parting from him. The thought of that parting was becoming a torment to her; the pain was too sharp to admit of further pretence. The discovery was but a slight shock to Nell, for she had now been transported out of herself. Her heart and mind were possessed by passion to the exclusion of all else, the ordinary springs of her will seemed to have dried up, the current of her mind to have cut for itself a new channel, a torrent-bed down which it rushed without check or hinderance. The power of self-criticism had gone; the collapse of her character seemed but the more complete for her former struggles. Faithfulness to Simon, until now a difficult but noble task, had become a sickening burden which she could hardly drag along from hour to hour; his single-hearted devotion an offence, his blind unsuspicion an insupportable aggravation. In her mind, surcharged as it now was, there was no room for pity or kindness or common justice; Simon was simply the tyrant who had bound her for life to his will, who looked with smiling calm upon her despair.

Mrs. French-Chichester paid Nell a visit about this time, and went

away curiously thrilled. Something in the girl's pale face and stormy eyes almost shocked her. She had witnessed a good deal of thin sentimental love in her time, but never the possession of a strong nature by a strong passion. She felt even a little scared at the course things were taking, though at the same time thrilled with keenest expectation. It was evident that the crash was at hand, and she began to wonder what might be its consequences. What of Lord Timon when his eyes should be opened? She was aware that his easy good-nature lay upon the surface of the man, that there were morbid depths in his character, and possibly violent emotions, of which few of his friends had the least suspicion; and that his love for Nell was the taproot of his life, his trust in her the soil which nourished it. Reflecting thus, she resolved to go no more to Moor Gates until the crisis should be over, to avoid the neighborhood of the coming explosion religiously.

Meanwhile, under Terence's subtle manipulation, under the constant appeal of his eyes, the yearning of his whole manner, his meek gratitude for every kind word she gave him, Nell's fever reached a climax. The situation was now intolerable to her; she had a craving desire first to shake off the burden of her engagement, then to flee abroad with her father, and see neither Terence nor Simon again until time and change had given her back self-mastery. One night she wrote to Simon a short pitiless note—the cry of a prisoner for liberty. Next morning, when he rode over, reaction had come, and she tore the note to pieces without giving it him. When he was gone she wrote again, this time a letter more like herself, in which she poured out the history of her long, futile efforts to care for him. This gave her some relief in the writing, but she tore it up again in an hour, feeling too hysterical and unhinged to face the consequences it would entail. When he talked glowingly of the coming honey-moon and the fair cities of Italy through which they were to wander, she listened in stony silence, feeling her chains too strong to be broken.

Simon became seriously uneasy about his betrothed, but attributed her changed state solely to ill-health. He spoke to her father, who had noticed little, however, and concluded simply that the great heat was affecting her as it did himself. Then Simon spoke to Terence, and got nothing but moody generalities for his pains. Pressed further, Terence became first irritable, then savage; and Simon returned to his astronomical work, puzzled and hurt at his friend's conduct, but without the ghost of a suspicion as to the

truth. Though the air was charged with the weight of the coming storm, he was quite unable to read the ominous signs that were gathering around him.

On the last evening of the fortnight, the farewell evening of Terence's visit, Mrs. French-Chichester could no longer support the gnawing pangs of curiosity; a reconnoitring expedition to Moor Gates became a physical necessity.

In order to make her visit as casual and informal as possible she decided to saunter over, if only a cool breath would come to relieve the panting afternoon, and entreat Nell to take pity on a lonely old woman, who had dined alone seven nights in succession, and come over to Hollacomb. This plan would be simple, plausible, and sufficient; for after such a trudge on foot Nell would certainly insist upon her spending the evening at Moor Gates, and a single hour with the Tredethlyns would give so astute an observer a pretty clear impression of how things were progressing.

The walk through the woods turned out to be stifling beyond expression, and the final climb to Moor Gates up a steep lane, whose high ferny banks cut off whatever breath of air might be moving, caused Mrs. French-Chichester to register a solemn vow never to do the distance on foot again; better the ravages of curiosity than such a squandering of vital power as this.

Just as she crossed the Monks Damerel road, making for the lodge gate opposite, the exhausted widow was overtaken by Simon Secretan. She was pleased to meet him, and her heart beat quickly at the discovery that he was in a morbid, downcast mood. Did this portend the climax, the closing scene of Simon's love-drama? Would the presentiments that had occupied her mind only this morning be fulfilled? A few minutes' conversation as she toiled along, leaning upon Simon's strong arm, assured her that these hopes were premature. He spoke anxiously of Nell's indifferent health, but it was clear that his present disquiet had some other origin.

Simon was, in fact, fresh from one of those painful scenes with his father, which had become matters of almost daily experience lately; for as Sir Hamo's health declined all his idiosyncrasies grew more pronounced, and his unnatural dislike of his son took a firmer hold upon him. He would sometimes refuse to see Simon for two or three days together, then would summon his son only to carp at and harass him. Why did he neglect Nell for his paltry play-work up at the observatory? Why had he not made her his wife long

ago, and so given a little brightness and love to his father's declining days? He had always been a lukewarm lover, had slighted the sweetest girl in the world for the sake of his useless mathematics, or for benevolent schemes that only set people by the ears. He might have given a little consideration to a dying parent's comfort and happiness; but no—any idle cottager or loafing town ragamuffin was of more importance than the parent who had begotten him. Thus would Sir Hamo scourge his son, ofttimes cutting him with quotations from the Latin poets, or lines from "King Lear" about the serpent's tooth and a thankless child.

And Simon had no skill to soften his father, no feminine tact wherewith to divert or lighten the invalid's hypochondria. Too proud to defend himself, he could only return moodiness for moodiness, while the morbid vein that ran through father and son alike made between them an iron barrier.

After a more perturbing scene than usual Simon would walk fiercely over to Moor Gates with a view to taking it out of himself with violent exercise, and afterwards soothing his spirits with Nell's company; and in this mood he had come over to-day.

Upon reaching the house Simon and his cousin were informed that Mr. Tredethlyn had not yet returned from Chillington, and that Miss Nell and Doctor Clancy were in the garden. The servant made this announcement to Mrs. French-Chichester in a specially significant manner, adding under her breath,

"Miss Tredethlyn returns in a few days, ma'am."

The girl's tone was a sufficient revelation that the maids were not as blind as their master.

"Well, shall we go in search of them, Simon?" Cousin Kathleen's voice was a little shaky in spite of herself, her presentiment having returned with renewed force. It might be, she thought, that Terence had screwed his courage to the sticking point on this his last day, that the hour of her triumph over Simon was actually at hand. There was a look of mingled fearfulness and gratified spite in her pale eyes, her breath came short, and her smile was anxious. If things had fallen out according to her wishes, there was no knowing what might be the final issue of Simon's discomfiture. She would not have exchanged the tingling excitement of this moment for any knowable happiness, though her extreme nervousness amounted almost to a pain.

Unconscious Simon, cheered by the near prospect of seeing Nell, had by now plucked up his spirits somewhat.

"I dare say," he remarked, briskly, "Nell has taken Terence up for a look at her favorite bit of moor from under the larch clump?"

"Very likely." Her lips formed the two short words with difficulty. "The man's astounding blindness," she mused, "is ridiculous—or sublime, I hardly know which."

They threaded the garden paths, climbing gradually upward to where the ferny wall cut off the grounds from the moor.

"Not a glimpse of them yet; they'll be under the larches, as I said." Simon's voice was serene as the summer afternoon.

They were soon coasting along the low wall, with the blaze of gorse and heather on their right, and Chillington glimmering in hot mist away on their left. Then they entered the green gloom of the larches, their noiseless feet pressing the carpet of moss beneath.

"Is this blind lover," Mrs. French-Chichester asked herself, as the dusk of the little wood encompassed them, and her pulses began to throb in her ears, "about to emerge into daylight in more senses than one?"

The moment afterwards they passed into the open space, where the garden-seat was placed, and at a stroke the blind lover received his sight. Before him, with their backs turned, sat Nell and Terence, hand in hand, cheek leaning against cheek, mind and soul lifted up and entranced.

For a second or two Simon stretched out his hands gropingly, like a veritable blind man; then reeled forward, with brain on fire, and every nerve braced with fierce longing to injure or kill the man before him. For the moment he was no better than a madman. He seized Terence by the hips, tossed him high over his head, and strode with him to the wall, making as though about to hurl him down upon the strewn granite bowlders on the other side. Nell fell to the ground half fainting with terror. Mrs. French-Chichester, leaning chalk-white and trembling upon the back of the seat, had the presence of mind to call Simon gently by his name, and the natural sound of her voice brought him back to his senses. He turned towards his cousin, and dropped his burden lightly among the brake-fern.

Then, before he had time to readjust his faculties or realize what had happened, she seized his hand and drew him away.

When she had got him to a safe distance, Cousin Kathleen, whose sympathies had gone over with a bound to the strong man who was trembling at her side, looked back over her shoulder. Nell was sitting with Terence's head in her lap, wailing and moaning over him.

He was unhurt, but limp and cowed with fright—without a grain of manhood left in him. Whereat the widow's lip curled, and her contempt waxed hot. For the first time in her life she admired and respected Simon.

"Nell, Nell," she muttered, "we've all been fools not to comprehend this man better—and you the worst of all, to throw him up for hat pretty, sentimental, tear-stained doll yonder!"

CHAPTER XVI

When Simon found himself, after some hours of fierce striding over the moor, at the door of that familiar workshop, his observatory, the first outrush of rage and despair had passed over; he had reached the stage when the mental faculties begin to clear, to measure the dimensions and test the weight of what at first seemed a huge formless bulk of trouble filling up the universe. He had got far enough away from the ugly thing to be able to realize its shape and size, to become aware that the world had not ceased to revolve, although the main hinge of his own life had given way; that he was not even a man especially selected by Fate for the heaviest burden it could impose, but merely one on whom the most natural and ordinary of all disappointments had befallen. His logical habit had begun to assert itself, though his heart was full of wrath and bitterness.

On his workshop table he found a letter, sent off by Nell in the morning, awaiting him in company with several others, for, when purposing to spend the whole evening at Moor Gates, he generally arranged to have his second-post letters awaiting him at the observatory.

This letter was, in substance, the one which Nell had written and torn up several times lately; its perusal was to Simon like the feel of cold iron.

True, he was by this time beginning to realize how his own blindness had contributed to the disaster; to admit frankly that his fatuous throwing of Clancy into such close relation with Nell was the achievement of an unthinking fool; even to force upon his own recollection the frankly spoken diffidence with which she had first accepted him. But there remained the bitter fact that all the affection he had lavished upon her had warmed her heart no whit, that her letter was nothing but a prisoner's cry for liberty, that the very kindness and sympathy which she lavished upon the world at large were denied to himself. He felt that he had deserved something better than this cutting note from Nell, and could as yet make no allowance for her distracted condition. Some day, perhaps, he

might make a different summing up of the matter as between Nell and himself; at present he could only encourage the demon of jealousy to enter his mind and take full possession.

Against Terence Clancy he felt a resentment that grew deeper as thought added itself to thought. For months he had been concerning himself about this man's prospects, seeking opportunities for him, making friends for him; had raised him from drudging poverty to something like affluence, had been to him a friend and a brother—and Terence had requited his benefactor with this ignoble treachery.

Henceforward Simon resolved to be a cynic of the cynics; he felt that his attitude towards human nature would pass from one extreme to the other, that he was now hovering between his old fatuous optimism and an acrid pessimism which time would justify and encourage. If Terence, whom he had always thought so frank and honest, so warm-natured and guileless, so incapable of the least meanness—if Terence Clancy, his own familiar friend whom he loved, could practise such subtle perfidy as this, what must be looked for from the general ruck of those around him? "In whatsoever direction I turn," thought Simon, in his wrath and gloom, "some like discovery will await me; I will trust and believe in no man in future, not a soul, but accept the simple truth that self-interest is man's only motive and care."

So he went on brooding by the dim light of his turned-down lamp, while all the morbid fibres of his character, silent hitherto for want of the touch of Misfortune's finger, awoke and made mournful music. He was entering upon a new quest, bent upon an eager search for human depravity, schooling himself to expect it of every one, resolved to delve it up and feast his eyes upon it everywhere.

When he had sufficiently hugged to himself his new discoveries, and darkened his heart as much as his mood required, he glanced through the rest of his correspondence.

One note furnished him with just the kind of news for which he now felt himself to be craving. It was a hurried scrawl from Frank Nelson, the vicar, and regretfully informed Simon that his agent, Jackson—"Fat Jackson," as he was generally called in Chillington—was believed to have absconded.

Friends and acquaintances had ofttimes warned Simon against this agent, a plump, bald-headed little man, full of geniality, and of a waggish good-nature which cloaked the cunning of a serpent; but Simon, thanks to his trick of wilful unsuspicion, had continued not

only to employ this acute rogue, but to throw plenty of temptation in his way. Jackson had been managing director of all my Lord Timon's charitable schemes, waxing fatter and more genial on the toll that he had managed to extract from every one. It now appeared from the vicar's note that a large sum appertaining to the new Working Men's Club—which, thanks to a lack of the most ordinary business precautions on Simon's part, had been placed in Jackson's hands—was now missing. In fact, the genial little man, flushed with the success of previous minor peculations, had appropriated the whole, travelled up to London first-class without troubling to leave an address behind him, and was now doubtless spending the money like a lord.

Simon laughed harshly at this news, for the discovery of another scoundrel in a man whom he had trusted fitted in with his savage mood to a nicety. "They warned me against him," he muttered, "but the result would have been the same whomsoever I had trusted. One man is just like another; apply the acid of temptation, and every one is found to be of the same base metal." He laughed again more harshly as he thrust the letters into his pocket and marched off down the hill, pitying his own simplicity in having taken so many years to make this commonplace discovery. "Too much star-gazing has blinded me," thought he; "none but an astronomer could have hugged his folly so long."

As he strode down the long spur which divides the upper combe into two heads, the square mass of the Hall loomed vaguely up from the white mists of the low ground. Catching sight of it, he paused suddenly, and allowed the waves of bitterness to immerse him for a moment. This place was to have been their home—Nell's and his. In a few weeks he was to have brought hither his sweet bride, who was to reconcile his father to him, to pass through life always at his side — the honored, the beloved, the peacemaker, the idolized wife, the tender mother of his children. And she, too, had succumbed to the most ordinary temptation; even she, his affianced bride, was not to be trusted for an hour; his jealous eyes should always have been upon her, he should never have allowed even his most trusted friend so much as to touch her hand.

In this his dark hour a great longing towards his father took possession of Simon; he felt a strong outrush of the heart towards the old man, who would now surely cease to be a stranger to his only son. A hope sprang up in Simon's sore heart that the ice of estrangement might now at the eleventh hour be broken; that he

might yet, before the old eyes closed in death, see in them the affection for which he had never ceased to look. There had been faults on his side, too; his pride had helped to estrange his father, he had exacted too much, had allowed too little for an invalid's weakness and irritability—and all this he would freely confess.

From where he stood Simon could see that a light was burning in the library, and he knew that the old man must be sitting up reading, as he would often do, now that sleep had become more difficult. The gazer's heart was uplifted by this opportunity, a fresh spring of hope welled up as he thought how he would go in to the old man, and lay bare his trouble, and say, "Father, I have sinned."

He moved down the hill with increased vigor of step, with a kindling of human kindness, and a warm desire to make up for past shortcomings. The old father loved Nell, too; he would surely feel with Simon, be drawn to him by the bonds of a shared trouble.

Descending rapidly, Simon dived into the thick mist of the hollow, and presently entered the formal old garden by a small stone-arched gateway. Thence he made his way through green galleries, and past the great hedge of clipped yew to the terrace steps.

Sir Hamo was sitting in his favorite bay, with his books beside him, but the reading-lamp turned low. On drawing close to the window, Simon saw that he was asleep, with one hand laid upon an open book, the other supporting his bent head. The old man looked very worn and feeble, and seemed hardly to breathe; a lonely pathetic figure he seemed to his son, whose heart smote him afresh as he drew nearer. The volume on the sleeper's knee was "In Memoriam," the only modern poem that had much appeal for Sir Hamo. He had been steeping himself in the divine despair of the verse, and now perchance was dreaming of the wife with whom had departed his desire of life.

Simon's yearning for reconciliation grew stronger; and here surely were conditions ready fitted to that end, for his own heart was humbled, and the tears of the poet must have been falling like dew upon his father's. He stole softly into the house, making straight for the library door.

The old man awoke at the sound of his son's footsteps in the room, his grand silver head gleaming in the lamplight as he raised it. He scarcely seemed to recognize Simon at first; his eye wandered vaguely round the room, as though passing over some dream-scene that had but half faded. Then he said, slowly,

"Simon, is it you? I was dreaming of your mother. Her face

was strangely near and real to me, and I perceive now that you are a little like her—only a little, though, so no wonder I have never seen the likeness before. Yes, I was dreaming of her, and—and I think our reunion is not far off, for I feel very weak to-night, my heart troubles me, and I feel years older than yesterday. I believe that I shall soon leave you—my son."

It was long since he had thus addressed Simon; the words "my son," spoken in the delicate refined voice which had so long been used to grow harsh or petulant at Simon's approach, thrilled the latter in his wrought-up state, and carried fear with them—the dread that his father's end was really approaching. He drew near the arm-chair, his eyes full of anxious solicitude. He dared not touch his father's hand for fear of scaring away this new-born complacence, but placed his own hand beside the old man's upon the open volume, saying,

"Father, father, don't talk of leaving me yet—just when you are learning to care for me. Father, I have need for you. I want you to forgive the pride which has never let me say this before."

"Ah, Simon, you've always been very proud and hard; dear Hamo—my dear son Hamo—would never have thwarted an old man's fancies as you have done. He was kind and gentle, not stiff and stubborn like you."

"Father, I have been to blame—yet God knows I have always loved you."

"Well, well, 'tis somewhat late in the day to tell me so. We have drifted apart—thanks to your pride and frowardness, Simon—and it is over-late for soft speeches now."

"You were dreaming of my mother?" asked Simon, hoping thus to soften him.

"Yes, I was dreaming of a fair land full of flowers, through which she swept, coming to meet me with shining eyes. But I will not speak to you of that sacred meeting. You are like all the scientific men, hard and heartless; caring only to drudge and delve among material things; aye, you're even as the poet says,

> "One that would peep and botanize
> Upon a mother's grave."

Simon's face hardened, and his voice grew bitter. "I suppose it is because of my hardness that the friend whom I trusted has betrayed me, the woman I loved has asked and obtained her release from me?"

"What do you mean? Are you befooling me to suit some whim?"

"A man hard-stricken as I am hardly cares to befool the only person in the world from whom he dares hope for sympathy."

"Do you mean—do you dare to tell me that you have quarrelled with Nell?"

The invalid half rose from his chair, his pale cheek flushed as he swept the volume from his knee and turned upon his son like a judge about to pronounce sentence.

"There has been no quarrel, sir," Simon answered, with the indifference of one to whom all sentences are alike; "but it has happened to me to find out once for all that she has no affection for me. We are more widely separated than if we had never met."

"Then your conduct has been bad," cried the old man tremulously; "nothing but that could have estranged my loving, generous Nell. You have neglected her; I've seen it, and spoken of it a dozen times. You've cared more for your 'work,' as you call it, for haggling with some paltry group of asteroids, or measuring some unthinkable distance in space, or—tush! I have no heart for casting up the sum of your follies; you have neglected her, I say!"

Simon listened with a hard smile, disdaining to defend himself, too proud and too loyal to think of accusing Nell.

"It is the last straw," murmured his father, sinking wearily back among his cushions. "I have nothing to detain me here now. I thought to have dear Nell here to comfort my last hours, smooth my dying pillow; but even that you have denied me. You might at least have deferred your quarrel until I was laid to rest. You have grudged me even the few months of peace that were left me. Dear Nell—poor Nell! My son has neglected you and chilled even your heart, for I suppose a thankless son makes a cold lover."

"I will say no more, sir. You should try and get some rest. Will you take my arm, and let me assist you up-stairs?"

"No, no; I will not take your arm. The very sound of your voice is painful to me to-night. You have dealt me the hardest blow that has been laid upon me since your mother's death. All I ask of you is to ring the bell and summon Mrs. Henley, who will give me what assistance I need."

Simon had fired his last shot, and had nothing now to fall back upon but his pride; but even so it was not in him to lay aside his courtesy or stoical forbearance. He assisted his father back to the

arm-chair, endeavoring by the calmness of his manner to soothe the old man's agitation, then rang the bell to summon the housekeeper.

Mrs. Henley appeared with a suspicious readiness, which Simon in his present mood could interpret without difficulty; he guessed rightly that she had been listening to their dialogue through the keyhole. She was a hard, thin-lipped, spiteful-looking woman, who now cast upon him a look of more open dislike than she had ever hitherto permitted herself to enjoy.

There were gleams of triumphant malice in her cold eyes, and Simon, exercising his new-born faculty of suspicion with the swiftness of one "not easily jealous, but being wrought, perplexed in the extreme," looked through and through this woman for the first time in his life. He had been surprised at times, in a passing, casual way, at her want of friendliness, old family retainer as she was; now he could trace her enmity to its source. She had expectations from Sir Hamo, looked for a fat legacy from the master whom she had often nursed in sickness, and had the inevitable hatred of a mean nature for Sir Hamo's heir. For years she had been helping to alienate the old man from his son; and Simon knew this now as certainly as though by her own confession.

Nor would Cousin Kathleen be henceforth in the least degree enigmatic to him; her pains to gain an influence over Sir Hamo, her constant petty disparagement of himself, were now seen to have a plain meaning and an adequate first cause. Nay, more—for the whole truth seemed to burst upon him now in one vivid flash—it was she who had undermined him with Nell. It must be so; he could swear that it was so, though no such thought had ever entered his mind until this moment. She had favored Terence, had been his backer and stealthy abettor, as Simon could perceive, now that the key of the situation was in his hand. Terence might have been her unconscious tool, but a tool he had been. She had used him to widen the breach between father and son, and so to wrench them asunder, and leave the old man with no one but herself to look to. That was the end which this cheery, pleasant woman, this popular Lady Bountiful, whose good-nature was a byword in the neighborhood, had set herself, and had now attained. So Simon, enlightened by his wrath and bitterness, concluded; and he was not far from the truth.

And how many more were to be writ down scheming plotters? In truth, Simon knew not where to stop; his bitterness widened and

deepened until all the ground around him seemed to be rotten and shaky; until he resembled one who has dreamed of treading upon carpets of flowers, and wakes suddenly to find himself in the heart of a black, quaking bog, with foul mists brooding and crawling on all sides, with no path, no sky, no horizon, no hope.

CHAPTER XVII

Kate Tredethlyn was seated in the breakfast-room at Moor Gates next morning, awaiting the appearance of her father. Having received a telegram from him the night before, urging her immediate return home, she had thrown herself, full of gloomy forebodings, into the night mail, and had driven up to the door but a few minutes since.

Miss Nell, the servants told her on arrival, was in bed, and seemed very unwell, and it did seem as though— But Kate would not give ear to another word, instinctively dreading to hear Mr. Clancy's name mentioned, and anxious to check the maids' gossiping, if possible. The telegram, by its very baldness, had put her mind upon the right track. Had there been sickness in question, it would have been mentioned. She was keenly conscious that some crisis quite unconnected with health had occurred, and her fears went straight to Nell and Terence Clancy.

Mr. Tredethlyn came down as soon as he was informed of Kate's arrival. He looked pale and perturbed after a sleepless night, and his daughter's greeting was far from encouraging. There was an awkward confession to be got through. He had to set forth, to a daughter whose attitude had always been rather critical than sympathetic, how certain things had been going on, unperceived, under his very nose, and what a climax of unpleasantness had supervened. Yet, from one or two points of view, it was a relief to see Kate, whose good sense could always be relied upon; and he hoped that anxiety would at least dilute her sarcasm in some measure. On the whole he felt rather like one who, conscious of alarming symptoms, hastily summons his doctor, yet, dreading the probable curative treatment, thinks he will talk about the weather, after all.

Certainly it was nervous work beginning. He plumped into his chair ungracefully, and asked Kate somewhat plaintively to pour out his coffee. He could have been more dignified had she looked less stern.

Kate attended to her father's wants with grave propriety, but in the very movement of her fingers there was a promise of something sharper to come.

"I suppose," she began presently, steadying her voice with difficulty, "your hasty summons has something to do with Nell?"

"Precisely, my dear. I was just about to open the matter to you; but—but I'm afraid it will distress and vex you a good deal."

"I have scarcely a doubt but that it will be something unpleasant, father. Has Mr. Clancy been up here much lately?"

"He has—been staying here—for—a few days."

"Staying here? At whose invitation, father?"

"My own, of course, my dear."

"I see."

Kate's look resembled that of a school-master when he turns to the corner where the cane stands; and if the large parson had not the face and figure of a school-boy, he had the feelings of one at this moment. He winced painfully, his plump cheeks grew a shade paler. He was ready to agree twice over with everything Kate might say, and would have preferred almost any penance to the prickly possibilities of the next ten minutes.

"Pray tell me what has happened."

Kate's tone made him wince again; it had the shrewdness of an east wind.

Yet, now that he was really in for it, Mr. Tredethlyn recovered his courage, and was able to speak with dignity. He had always been a good speaker, and now gave as terse and telling an account of the events of the last few days as could be desired.

Kate listened with quivering nerves and a desire to go away and weep somewhere. Her very worst forebodings had come true; the situation seemed as disgraceful as she could well conceive. Her heart swelled with indignation against both Terence and Nell.

"No man was ever worse treated than Simon has been!" she cried, her tears breaking out and her voice choking.

"Yes," her father sighed heavily, "that is the quick of the ulcer—Nell's treatment of poor old Simon. I don't know how I shall ever look him in the face again."

"How could you have the man up here, father, and let him work upon Nell's weakness day after day? How *could* you?"

"My dear, I never dreamt—"

"You should have dreamt," sobbed Kate. "I often gave you hints; I often tried to impress you with a sense of Nell's danger; and yet, the moment my back is turned, you overthrow all my precautions at a stroke. Oh, father, had you been but less wrapped up in your own little ailments—"

She stopped herself abruptly and covered her face with her hands. She had never spoken with such audacious candor before, and she saw that her words stung her father like a whip-lash. His large comely face flushed deeply as he drew himself up to answer her.

"My dear, I am aware that I have been to blame, but I never expected to be told so by my own daughter. Yes," he added, with a humility that made Kate ashamed in a moment, "I have been gravely to blame in this matter, and the knowledge of my own shortcomings makes me anxious not to deal hardly with poor Nell."

Kate the undemonstrative drew near to her father and kissed him penitently. The situation, though pregnant with deeper trouble than they could yet foresee, had, at least, produced one good result, for father and daughter had never understood one another so well as at this moment.

"The man has a good heart," Mr. Tredethlyn continued in a troubled voice; "I'm bound to say that of Clancy, though his apparent perfidy pains me. I don't think, however, that there has been anything like deliberate treachery, but only culpable weakness, given way to and encouraged. As for Nell, her inconstancy amazes me."

"I won't have Nell abused, father; she never cared for Simon. Her collapse has been the end of a long struggle."

"But I have perceived nothing of the sort."

"No—precisely."

"Surely I must have—"

"I suppose you have been otherwise engaged, father."

Kate's voice was still a little dry.

"Was Terence aware of this?"

"I don't know, and don't care. I won't hear a word in the man's favor. I hate him—I *hate* him, I tell you!"

"He has done us a serious injury, and I find it hard enough to find any excuse for him, Kate. But, as I said, I blame myself also. There has been selfish blindness on my part. And justice is justice. Terence has certainly not spared himself. After that scene in the larch clump, when he came to confess, he told me how wretched he was, how he would rather have cut off his right hand than so injure a friend and benefactor—"

"Ah, yes; doubtless he protested enough. Terence Clancy never wanted for eloquence. I hate a shifty, half-bad man like that worse than a genuine scoundrel."

"Your sex is somewhat apt to appreciate a genuinely good man less than either, my dear."

"What did you say to the pair, father?"

"I hardly know, they overwhelmed me so with amazement; but doubtless I said some very bitter things, and certainly I forbade Nell to see or speak to Clancy again."

"I wish you could remember what you said, and I only hope you stung him to the quick. I would ask no greater happiness at this moment than five minutes of plain speech with Terence Clancy. But that would never do; anything of that sort might alienate Nell for life, for—mark me, father—she'll marry the man."

"My dear Kate, surely we can prevent that! I will flatly forbid such a sacrifice. The man is utterly unworthy of Nell."

"Aye — unworthy to tie her shoe-lace, and that's how she comes to care for him," said Kate, bitterly. "And think of the scandal, the disgrace — horrible! It goes to the marrow of one's bones to think what people will say of her. But trust me for knowing her, father; I say that no earthly power will prevent her having him now. If we choose to make a martyr of him, we may complete the disgrace by a clandestine match; but a match there will be."

"But surely our gentle little Nell can be worked upon and made to see—"

"Our little Nell is a person of strong nature and unspeakable obstinacy; and think to what a pitch she must have reached to break her engagement in this disgraceful way! No hope, believe me—not a grain."

"And poor Simon?"

"I can hardly bear to think of him, but shall write at once to let him know my opinion of all this. I believe nothing could be worse for him just now than the silence of his friends. Better make him rage than let him brood."

"I believe you are right, Kate. It will be well for me to write also, though a more painful duty was never laid upon me. What are we to do about Clancy? what steps shall I take?"

"Nothing we can do will make any difference in the end, be assured of that. We may procrastinate a little, and so water down our disgrace in a measure. Let Nell be sent away from now until, say, December, which will give Chillington about three months to masticate and digest the broken engagement, and will make the next news less shocking. I will answer for Mrs. French-Chichester's silence. It will be generally understood that Nell and Simon have quarrelled, and there'll be so many theories as to the cause that the truth may chance to get lost among them."

"In that case, blame might accrue to Simon. Better tell the whole truth than that."

"There'll be plenty of blame thrown about, whatever course you take, father. Some will blame Simon, others Nell; and nearly all will blame us. Every one will say, 'I told you so,' and every second person, 'Serve them right' We can no more hinder the shower than we can the autumn rains just beginning. I shall go about in a mackintosh of haughtiness, that's all—and get myself more unpopular than ever."

"What about Terence during Nell's absence?"

"He must visit us—at least, now and then, in a formal way. If you cut him you show your hand at once, and, what is far more serious, you destroy any vestige of hope we have of bringing Nell to her senses. Once make a martyr of Terence, and good-bye to her. She and Simon are too much alike—that's the plain truth. I've always feared for them, and heartily wish she had broken with him before this subtle Irishman came on the scene. Our quixotic pair never were like other people—never quite rational; always in excess, always wandering in some dazzling region where the light is too strong for ordinary human nature."

"One more thing, Kate—after Nell returns?"

"Don't talk of that time," she cried; "after that the deluge — at least the wedding, for something tells me to expect the worst."

CHAPTER XVIII

On a certain windless day, late in December, Simon Secretan was leaning over the low stone-wall of the Monks Damerel road, looking down over Chillington. Through the thin clearing mist a trickle of rather wan light fell upon the roof of the railway station beneath him, upon the gray old town-hall beyond, and the square Gothic tower of the old church. There was little traffic along this road in the winter; Simon had a long stretch of it all to himself now. He was gazing intently, moving no more than the great rough stones upon which his arms rested.

For a long time he remained thus motionless, but at length the rumble of wheels induced him to turn his head round. A farmer's gig had just climbed the steep hill from the station, and its driver was touching up his horse with a view to a trot along the level, when a pale-looking woman, who sat beside him, caught sight of the leaning figure by the wall, and held up her hand.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Baker; but here *is* Mr. Secretan, so there's no call to trouble you further. Will you hand me out my baby-girl when I've got down?"

The young woman—she was but two-and-thirty, though strangers would have given her another ten years—descended; whereupon Mr. Baker handed down, impassively as he would have done a leg of mutton or a plucked fowl, a child of two years or thereabouts.

"Little sweetheart—precious little Rose-bud, come to mother! Now say, 'Thank you, Mr. Baker.'"

"I s'an't!" said the child, decisively.

The impassive Baker showed no concern, however, but drove on with a lift of his finger and a "Mornin', missis."

Simon, hearing his name mentioned, stared at the mother and child in a dazed sort of way, but could make nothing of them.

"Why, Mr. Simon, don't you know me, sir?"

"Is it you, Joyce? Where have you sprung from? You must forgive me, but I was lost in thought," Simon added, after a pause. The words which had first sprung to his lips were, "You're such a wreck of your former self, poor girl, that no wonder I didn't know you."

"You find me looking rather corpse-like, eh, sir?"

"No, no; a little pale."

Joyce laughed, and in doing so took Simon back a dozen years in half a second.

"There spoke your old self, sir; you would always sooner walk a dozen miles than hurt a body's feelings! That's how it was I never could sauce you as I did my step-mother. Aye, and even Sir Hamo himself at times."

Ill as she was, Joyce still looked quite capable of "saucing" a step-mother at a pinch. There was a lurking humor in her eye, an upward twitch about the corners of her mouth, and withal a hovering petulance—the after-math of a self-willed girlhood—which her worn looks but half concealed. She was a step-daughter of Sir Hamo's house-keeper, and had been brought up in the establishment from as far back as Simon could remember, indeed, had often been his nursery companion in old days. She was a small, whimsical, hot-tempered creature, who was made much of by almost all, and would be put upon by none. So popular did she become with the household, as she grew up, that her step-mother's jealous pangs waxed unbearable, and a daily increasing stream of complaints was poured into her master's ears. Sir Hamo's weak favoritism was easily played upon; every word of Mrs. Henley's had weight with him. Soon after the settlement of the family in these parts Joyce was packed off, after a severe interchange of broadsides with Mrs. Henley, to a genteel milliner's establishment in Chillington.

So placed, her skill and taste tended to countervail a slight leaning towards insubordination. If the discipline of the establishment suffered somewhat, its profits increased; and Joyce was in a fair way to success by the time a new weakness showed itself. She fell in love.

In company with her bosom friend, Mary Pethick, Joyce had turned up her nose at all the young shopkeepers of the place; but one evil day her humorous gray eye lighted upon a fine young cavalry sergeant from Lymport, by name Melladew.

At first Sergeant Melladew accepted her homage with good-humor; when it continued, he began to give ear to the reports concerning her step-mother's successful pickings-up at the Hall; then, having an even keener eye for the main chance than for female beauty, he decided to allow Joyce's good worldly prospects to outweigh the moderate quality of her looks. The rest followed in due course. Sergeant Melladew married, retired, and began to drink

away his wife's earnings. Chillington was found too dull for him, and its profits too small. He carried her off to Lymport, and installed her in a larger establishment—and the increased profits were met and parried by superior thirst. In brief, the man was a drunken brute—also a savage-tempered, loud-cursing, unfaithful brute. Joyce led with him a life of such wretchedness as satisfied even Mrs. Henley. She said nothing about it on her brief visits to the Pethicks and other old friends; but her paling cheek and failing step were a plain tale not to be misunderstood.

Some years had passed, when ex-Sergeant Melladew's life came to an appropriate and fitting close. His head was broken by the quart pot of an intimate, but quarrelsome, friend one evening in a tavern brawl at Lymport, and he only survived long enough to discharge one final bouquet of oaths. Joyce then found herself a free woman, though a broken one; and her chief desire, amounting almost to a mania, was to live long enough to guard her little Rose from the Sergeant Melladews who might cross her path. But Joyce's body had never been strong enough to support her gallant spirit; every week now, as it passed, ate away a fresh piece of her hope, for five years of a savage yoke had thoroughly broken her constitution.

When Simon began to ask about her health and prospects, she dismissed the subject with half a dozen words and a hard laugh; but no eloquence could have given him a clearer impression of her case. He felt strangely drawn to this widow, who had once upon a time been his playmate in the nursery.

"And this is your little Rose, is it, Joyce? I've heard of her once or twice through your friend Mary."

"Yes, sir; this is my sweet and precious little rose-bud girl." It was another voice that spoke now—a mother-voice, tender and soft as a spring breeze.

Simon marvelled at the change, having as yet studied human nature in the abstract rather than the concrete, and having been little thrown with mothers and children.

Little Rose returned his gaze with interest. She was a quaint, crisp little creature, with a tangle of fair curls, and dark-gray, roguish eyes.

"She has your—your—" he began, with a man's slowness in getting at the points of a child.

"My impudence, Mr. Simon? Aye, and happen she'll keep it—until she marries. Ah, if I had but a good watch-dog for the little one when I'm gone!"

"What has brought the pair of you here from Lymport, Joyce?"

"Why, just this, sir. I've had Mary Pethick stayin' with me for some time, and I wanted to bring her back safe to her father—for I'm not easy in my mind about that young thing, Mr. Simon."

"What ails her? I haven't seen her about here for months."

Joyce looked up with a queer twist in her face, and seemed to be weighing something.

"That's just what I was comin' to see you about, sir. I told Mary I should, and she's mighty savage with me in consequence. Hows'ever, I'm not easily frightened, and here I am. Mary's in trouble. She was engaged to be married to—"

"Ezekiel Doidge? Yes, I know, and it was broken off."

"Pshaw! that's nothing. Why was it broke off?—that's the question."

"I haven't a notion."

"That looks bad; he's a shrewd un, I fear! Harkee, sir—'twas because she was in love with some one else, with a gentleman, whose ring she's still wearin', who was her promised husband. He got tired of her o' course—one man's the same as another, as far as I know—and left off walkin' out with her. Lord bless me, 'tis an old story enough. She wrote and wrote, but never got another word out of him. He was makin' up to some lady of his own station, I doubt. Well, I judged from the girl's letters that she was miserable, and had her over to Lymport to help me with my Rosie, and get cheered up a bit—though the cheerin' han't come off yet. That's all you need know at present, sir. An' you're a deal too innocent to guess any more," she added, under her breath.

"Poor little Mary! Is her health bad? Is she much upset by this? What can I do for her?"

"Ah, that's just the point. She han't written to the gentleman for some time, but now she *must* see him."

"But, my good Joyce, how can I help her there?"

"Easy enough, sir. He's an intimate friend o' yours, as she tells me—a man as you've been a brother to and started in life, and—"

She stopped abruptly. Simon had fallen back a pace or two, and was staring at her amazedly.

"He's a young doctor, an Irishman—"

"I know, I know," muttered Simon. "There's nothing to be done, Joyce; she must bear her disappointment as other people have to do."

"Disappointment!" she repeated, fiercely. "Ah, how some of my husband's cuss-words would help me now!"

Joyce walked aside for a space, with a sullen flush darkening her pale face, and neither spoke.

After a few moments the silence was broken by the sound of bells. A loud, joyous peal clanged from the tower of the parish church below them.

"A weddin' peal, I reckon?" Joyce burst forth, with a harsh laugh. "I wonder who's the victim this time? What's the lady's name, Mr. Simon?"

"The bells are ringing for Miss Tredethlyn's marriage."

"Not Miss Nell? not the one that was—"

"Yes, the one that was mine."

"Sir, Mr. Simon, I didn't know, or I wouldn't have come pesterin' you to-day."

"Why not? One day's the same as another."

"Who's she marryin', sir?"

"The gentleman you were speaking of."

"Mr. Terence Clancy?" Joyce laughed loud and bitterly. "Lord, Lord, 'tis such a bitter, bad world that one must laugh or cry!"

Again they gazed down over the station roof in silence.

The streets in the neighborhood of the church were hidden by the houses, but there was evidently a stir in the place. People were hurrying across the open square by the town-hall, and the rumble of carriages could be heard through the swelling clang of the bells.

"How long has this affair been public news, sir?"

"Barely a fortnight, by the express wish of those concerned."

"I suppose that's how it is not a rumor of it has drifted over to Lymport. Look here, sir, yesterday Mary Pethick was in a queer state, oppressed with forebodings and fears, and she urged me to let her go; but my Rose wan't well, so I couldn't go with her—and now we're too late. Ah! I should ha' sent her off, I should ha' sent her off! I've spoilt her one chance now, poor Mary. O' course Fate's dead agen' her—who ever knew a stroke o' luck to come to any but a downright bad lot? Will you come an' see her now?" Joyce concluded, abruptly.

"Certainly—where is she?"

"Waitin' for us at the canal bridge below the farm. I promised to join her there after seeing you, and settlin' upon some plan for gettin' hold o' Mr. Clancy. We had best go down Pixie Lane, past the new cottages, and so on by the canal path."

"Are you able to walk the distance, Joyce?"

"I mean to, able or not."

"Then give me the child."

This was more easily said than done. Miss Rose, finding herself perched upon the shoulder of a great tall stranger, screamed as though the universe were on the point of collapse, nor had big Simon the ghost of an idea how to pacify her. This gave him an opportunity, however, of watching the practice of an art, new to him, but old as the human race.

For the baby's attention was in a trice distracted to a passing "puff-puff." Before that was out of sight, a robin piping from the ash-tree hard by was pointed out as an object of breathless interest. Next, a small boy with clinking milk-cans was offered up in like manner, grinning to find himself so much admired. Simon, noting how suddenly the big tears ceased to roll, thought it all a marvel of cleverness.

Then, poor mother was so tired, so very tired, that it was needful for the baby to stroke her cheek and say, "Poor—poor! oh, poor—poor, not we-e-ll!" This formula, quaintly drawled, with a wrinkling of the small nose, was the signal for peace; the Rose-bud began to chuckle and kick as they moved off, to drum on Simon's breast with heels, to clutch his hair and mustache, and presently to tear off his hat and beat him on the head with its brim. And so they passed down the hill-side, the child bubbling and babbling, and shrieking with laughter, only stopping now and then to cry, "Poor—poor! oh, poor—poor!"

Had Joyce known who was following them at a distance, she would have led Mr. Secretan anywhither rather than to Hollacomb Farm, for, unknown to her, Ezekiel Doidge had seen her arrival with Mary, seen the latter walk away homeward, watched Joyce get into Mr. Baker's gig, and guessed her destination.

Ezekiel had been in a bad way ever since Mary's departure for Lymport. On the night of their farewell, when he finally released his betrothed from her engagement, he had parted from her with bitter words and fierce hints as to Mr. Secretan, his supposed rival; and the folly of this had weighed upon him since. He had written almost abject letters to Mary, entreating her to forgive his harsh conduct, and always to let him be her friend. The only answer she had vouchsafed him had been gentle and humble—so unlike herself, indeed, as to frighten him. He wished earnestly that she would return that he might keep a friendly watch upon her, and

reason her out of this fatuous inclination towards a gentleman so far out of her reach.

In his jealous, harassed mind, Ezekiel had worked out an explanation of the sudden breakage of Secretan's engagement. Miss Nell, he conceived, must have had suspicions, must have become aware of some secret communication between her lover and Mary Pethick; and now that the engagement was over, there would be nothing to check such intercourse. This thought drove Ezekiel half crazy. He watched the trains in from Lymport day after day, or made secret excursions thither to spy out Mary's goings-on; and now his worst suspicions were confirmed. Here was Mary's friend capturing Secretan and leading him off—reluctantly, too, as Doidge's eager suspicion suggested—to an interview with Mary. It looked black, inky black, to poor driven Ezekiel. He followed them now, sweating with jealous dread and hatred.

Sheltered by the woods on the south side of the valley, Ezekiel watched the pair cross the open and turn down the path beside the canal, when there was no longer any doubt in his mind that they were in search of Mary. Nor was there any hurry, since a short-cut across some of his own fields, just below Mr. Secretan's new allotment gardens, would take him to the farm well before them. He had time to loiter while he forged into one chain the links of suspicion that circumstances, aided by Mary's unhappy shuffling, had placed in his hand.

Meanwhile, Simon and his companions progressed slowly. Joyce was almost dropping with fatigue by the time they had gone half a mile, and needed many rests; and little Rose, well dowered as she was with her mother's wilfulness, insisted upon being set down frequently in order to make tottering excursions after dogs, pigs, chickens, and other such creatures of the chase. Nor was there any talk worth mentioning between them. Joyce would say not a word more as to Mary Pethick, except, "Wait and see, Mr. Simon, then I think you'll know all."

They passed slowly along the canal path, halting many times. Terence Clancy's insistent joy-bells followed them, never ceasing for a moment. By the time they reached the farm the afternoon was closing in, and Joyce felt that she could barely muster courage to crawl on as far as the ivied bridge, where Mary would be awaiting them.

It was there that Mary had first plighted her troth to Ezekiel, and finally parted from him; there that she had first met Terence

Clancy, and thrilled at his kind voice and friendly words. She had a fatalistic attraction towards the spot, as though her fate were bound up with it. "You'll have bad news to bring me, I know, Joyce," she had remarked, "and I'd rather take the blow there than anywhere."

Mary was standing close to the bridge when they arrived, among the broken reeds and trampled leafage of autumn; and what flicker of hope there was in her face died out as soon as her eyes met Joyce's eyes. The wan smile froze on her lips, and the going forth of her feeble hope shook Simon to the soul. Joyce's forecast proved correct—he needed no explanation. He was looking for the first time upon despair, and recognized it as certainly as he would have done death. But a moment ago he had been oppressed by the melancholy of nature, by the fading of daylight among ruined woodlands; now he could only see the girl's face. Before this human misery the scene, with its surface pathos, melted away, leaving only the stricken face, from which he could not look away. It filled him with a gnawing pain, bore in upon him the infinite littleness of such troubles as had fallen to his own lot; it was as though all the travail of a groaning world were concentrated for a moment in a single pair of human eyes.

He turned aside, leaving poor shaken Joyce, as he thought in his heart, to do the last offices for the dead hope, since the living soul from which it had fled could know no comfort.

CHAPTER XIX

THE brief two weeks which Terence had been able to snatch for his honey-moon were over; he had brought home his bride to the White House on the hill.

It was Nell's first morning in her new home. Terence was awaiting her in the little breakfast-room, looking cheerfully out over the town and the hills, gleaming crisp and clear after forty-eight hours of rain. He had been stripping the small greenhouse and decorating the breakfast-table with the spoils. A bright fire crackled in the grate; a glint of winter sun struck boldly in through the French windows as though to emphasize and make the most of Terence's floral greetings to his young bride.

As he stood by the window Nell rustled into the room, and her smile was good to look upon.

"How like you, Terence," she cried, pointing at the table, "to squander every flower you possess upon me in this way! You've already gone far towards spoiling me, dear."

She went round the table, examining every flower, praising everything. Nell had always been one of those for whom it is a pleasure to do things; one whose quick gratitude for a trifling service made one reflect how easy must have been her nurse's task in first teaching her to say, "Thank you." When his bride took her place before the tea-urn, flushed with pride and happiness, Terence could hardly take his eyes off her.

"There's not a flower here half good enough for you, dear," he exclaimed, with fervor. "There's not one half so beautiful as your sweet self!"

"Ah, be off wid your blarney!" laughed Nell. "Ye're more Irish than I thought ye."

"Faith, you've got a heap of my failings to discover yet, Nell; they'll be pouring down on you soon, like last night's rain. My word, how it did drive and pelt! I see the river's in heavy flood this morning. Some of the people in the cottages down there'll be having a bad time, I fear."

"Let us go and see them presently, when you have time. But I

suppose you'll be hard at work all the morning, Terence. When do you expect to be free from your consulting-room?"

"Why, you see, this is our first morning at home; and a man can't plunge head-foremost into hard labor without taking a deep breath or two first. Jack Syme will do the oakum-picking this morning. What's the good of an assistant, if he doesn't take the drudgery off one's hand?"

Terence sighed a little at the mention of work, proceeding with his breakfast a shade more thoughtfully.

"I shouldn't be surprised," he continued, after a pause, "if I have to take Jack into partnership pretty soon. It would save a deal of trouble in the end."

"And would also diminish the profits a good deal, wouldn't it, dear?"

"What a mercenary little woman it is!"

"Why, yes; and you know the reason, Terence."

Nell also became thoughtful; and he was well aware of the drift of her thought. She was more than anxious about his debt—for so they both agreed to call it—to Simon, and was bent upon maintaining a course of rigid economy until it should have been paid in full.

As for the proposed transference of this debt to Mrs. French-Chichester, Terence had heard no more about it, and never expected to do so now that he knew the widow better. He was troubled by this obligation to Simon, but not so deeply permeated by it as was Nell. To him repayment was an object on the horizon, to be kept in view in a general way, and attained some day or other; to her, a goal to be striven for night and day.

He was humbly conscious of being on a lower moral plane than his wife. He looked to her to stiffen up his character, to be tolerant of his weaknesses, to lead him gently in the right way, the while she petted and idolized him. But Nell was yet very far from sharing these views. Her ideal was not to be shattered by a fortnight of marriage. She would have scoffed at the notion of his needing her help. He found it hard to work steadily—she knew that; but the mere routine of his profession must naturally be irksome to so clever a man. His enthusiasm would doubtless be kept for great things; in the small ones, perhaps, a commonplace woman like herself, with no particular talent in any direction, might be occasionally useful. That was Nell's conception of the matter.

"Don't you think," she asked, when their meal was over, and she

was standing before the fire with her hand in her wedded lover's, "that my father might help us in this trouble?"

"Ask him, dear," suggested Terence, with a twinkle in his eye. He had more than once had an opportunity of observing Mr. Tredethlyn's aversion to parting with money—a weakness patent enough to every one but Nell.

"Well, perhaps it wouldn't be quite fair?" she muttered, regretfully. "You know best."

"Perhaps it wouldn't be much use," thought Terence; but he only pressed her hand.

"Then we must make up our minds to hard work and strict economy. We sha'n't spend nearly all you earn, shall we? And I sha'n't want any new things for ever so long, Terence; and we can easily do with only two servants. I suppose you must keep both horses?"

"Ye-es; there'll be a long ride round the district every afternoon, don't you see? One horse would knock up in no time."

"Could you sell the hunter, and buy a cheap hack in his place?"

"Bless me!" thought Terence, "she'll be asking me to do the rounds on shanks's mare, dressed in fustian, soon! My dear child," he said aloud, with a flicker of his humorous eyes, "I must hunt in order to keep up the connection; and for the same reason we must keep a parlor-maid in addition to the other two, and keep up appearances generally."

"I see."

"Where are you off to now, Nellie?"

"To order lunch and dinner and see to all sorts of things."

"Well, then, I'll go to that torture-chamber and get on the rack at once. Some fool or other with an imaginary ailment is sure to be waiting there to stretch me. Jack Syme shall be freed for the town work this morning." He sighed deeply, but his wife promptly braced him up with a ravishing smile. "Yes, by George! I'll go and work like any nigger! Haven't I got the sweetest wife in Christendom to work for? Little girl, you always put me straight. I'd be a decent, hard-working man by now if I'd met ye years ago. Bedad! my brain's crackling with good resolutions now; and don't you believe what people tell you about such things going to pave the 'other place.' They're like good grain, I maintain, with fine possibilities about 'em. You sow, and of course every grain doesn't germinate; but *some do*, and you get a crop of some sort, however bad the season."

And so they parted for the present.

Terence was right as to the flooded condition of Chilling Water. The vehement stream was ramping forth from its moorland gorge and down its rocky bed, with spume and fret and fury. Leaping into the cultivated parts above the town, it overspread Mr. Doidge's meadows as though angered at the tamer scenery, and gurgled into the cottages of his laborers in a masterful, regardless fashion suggestive of the great Ezekiel himself.

Just below the town bridge the fierce river hurled itself in a gleaming curve over the artificial barrier created at this point in order to pen the water and press it into the mouth of the Hollacomb canal or leat. The water needed little persuasion in this direction now, but poured through the leat and flooded the vicarage garden knee-deep.

About mid-day half Chillington was gathered near the bridge, watching the flood and enjoying the unusual excitement.

"D'ye reckon," asked one of another, "that the weir'll hold out long agen thiccy?"

"Like enough her won't."

"If her gives, 'twill relieve this mort o' watter up over, and flood Mr. Secretan's cottages down along worse nor they be a'ready."

"So 'twould. And I tell 'ee what—'twould run the canal dry, like enough."

"How so, mister?" This question was put by half a dozen people at once.

"Because, you zanies, this pule be eight foot deep along o' the barrier, and if her gave, 'twould run down to two or three, and lay bare the mouth o' the leat. Should have thought any vule could a-zeed that. I've knowed the thing 'appen one dry zummer years agone, and the watter runned off and left leat channel dry as a gravel path."

"I don't believe it, gaffer," laughed Dr. Clancy, from the fringe of the crowd.

Then a dozen voices clanged, for or against, and so heady a wrangle ensued that Terence tucked his wife under his arm with a laugh and left them to settle it.

The pair walked away down-stream together, bending to the buffets of a humming gale, enjoying the movement and briskness of things in general. On all sides of them were townsfolk hurrying to the water-side, the business of the place being for the nonce suspended.

Nell was bent upon a brisk walk along the Bickington road, which followed the river for some distance, and which, as it rose the hill by

Hollacomb, would give them a good view of the pools and cascades overhung by the manor-house.

Terence acquiesced in this route, but without enthusiasm. He was averse to following a road which passed almost within hail of Hollacomb Farm; not so much from actual apprehension of meeting with Mary, for he thought her to be still at Lymport, as from a general dislike of the farm's neighborhood.

To do him justice, however, it must be said that, having read none of her letters, he had no suspicion whatever of Mary's being in great trouble. Ever since finally committing his heart to Nell's care he had kept Mary completely outside his mental horizon. So much he had achieved without difficulty, having the useful faculty, for which many would give half they possess, of thrusting all ordinary troubles into some dark cupboard of his mind and turning the key upon them. When he thought of her at all, his sanguine imagination easily conceived her as ere long returning to the faithful Doidge, or some other old lover, and living happily ever afterwards. But it cost him a qualm or two to take Nell anywhere near the scene of that dead romance.

Just below the town the Bickington road was raised above the low-lying meadows by an embankment, down to which ran the allotment gardens pertaining to Simon's new row of cottages. Upon reaching this point Nell and Terence looked down upon a curious scene.

The whole breadth of the gardens was converted into a muddy lake, scourged and flawed by the strong west wind; the neat row of cottages stood waist-deep in water.

Many persons had warned Secretan of such a possibility as this; but his genial agent, Jackson, had recommended the site strongly—doubtless for reasons having roots in his breeches-pocket—and Simon's fatal good-nature had been disastrous as usual.

Simon himself had been working like a horse all the morning, superintending the removal of goods and furniture, and doing much of the work with his own strong arms. He was at this moment staggering through the flood with certain belongings of his tenant Mrs. Parminter, who inhabited one of the cottages at a nominal rent. This good woman was the wife of an honest bombardier, who, after serving his time, was glad to re-engage and rejoin his battery in India with a view to living out of tongue-range of the most gifted shrew in Chillington town. Simon had taken pity upon the deserted wife, and was now reaping the reward of his virtue.

Mrs. Parminter was, in fact, seated upon her garden wall, viciously drumming the stones with her heels, the while she poured the full weight of her abuse upon her benefactor. Mr. Secretan had built these sties of cottages on purpose to delude honest folk; his philanthropy was nothing but accursed hypocrisy; his kindness a sham and a lie; he was a disgrace to the name of gentleman. Thanks to *he* she was a ruined woman; thanks to *he* every one of her little uns would be down with fever, while she herself died of the chill and the misery, and so on and so on.

Nell listened with a sick heart, a yearning to speak a word of friendship to Simon. She was very sore and sorry about him, and at the great barrier placed by circumstances between him and herself. Yet she could never say a word to him, never sympathize with him by a look. She was debarred from even speaking of what lay so near her heart, for Terence disliked the subject, was jealous of the reverence in which Nell held the discarded lover.

Terence was chafing now at her mournful looks. He hurried her away quickly westward, and was moody and silent for the next half-mile.

Just below Hollacomb the road, after leaving the river for a space, passed over a small knoll, upon climbing which they both uttered exclamations of astonishment. They had come in sight of the river again, and the first glance showed that there had been a sudden increase of the flood.

"Look!" cried Nell; "the water is much higher, and how it roars and foams! The dam must have broken."

"No doubt it has; and now those wiseacres of the town, who are probably wrangling still, will have a chance of settling their dispute as to the canal. Shall we walk on towards Bickington?"

They moved briskly on, presently leaving the main road for deep, winding lanes. For an hour they trudged along without meeting a soul, then halted at a road-side inn near Bickington with a view to afternoon tea, for which Nell declared herself to be pining. The exercise, together with the resplendent mood of nature—for it was a keen, crisp winter afternoon—had given a brighter tinge to their reflections; this comely young couple were hungry, happy, and radiant to look upon as they entered the inn parlor.

"Never have I a-zeed a prettier pair nor thiccy," said the landlord to his wife, when they adjourned to the kitchen together after taking Terence's orders.

Nell would never forget that picnic tea with her newly-made hus-

band. Such a bright world seemed before them as they rested in the snug little room—home and love, honest work and honorable endeavor; not a mere path through fairy-land to possible disillusion, but rather a homely workaday road, with hills to be breasted, dust to be borne; with something to deepen and prove a man's love, to give a fond wife the privilege of joyous self-sacrifice.

Terence found his own mare, Rosalind, in the inn stable, Syme having driven over to a pressing case a short time since. Presently Jack Syme appeared from the direction of the village, and after a brief discussion of the new case, was taken in-doors for a cup of tea.

Mr. Syme, being little in the way of society, had never yet actually spoken to Mrs. Clancy. Terence noted with pride how almost awe-struck with admiration the man was when first presented to his bride. Her sweet and winning manner, however, seemed to act upon Jack like a charm, and the more so since he had looked for the cold superiority with which the town and neighborhood were wont to treat him. He sat down—almost at ease, comparatively speaking—took his cup of tea from Nell's small hand, and did his honest best to make himself agreeable.

With people like Nell it is difficult to try to please without succeeding, and Jack tried so hard that she was quick to conceive him one of the kindest and most good-natured of men. She had the knack of encouraging a man to talk about himself—a topic upon which a man must needs be eloquent if he have the gift of speech at all. At any rate Jack soon found himself discoursing of his old life at Bartholomew's, of opera-bouffe and burlesque, farcical comedy and the ballet, of billiards and supper-parties; even of the little home at Hammersmith, of the old mother and the general servant, and their kindness to a rollicking scapegrace of a student like himself. In a word, his heart and tongue warmed, as a man's will under a woman's gentle tact, until he began to think of revising his rather pessimistic views of the comfortable classes. He was grateful to Terence, too, for the lift in life provided by his good-nature, and not a little pleased at the utter rout of that old enemy, Simon Secretan.

"Look here, Terence," this was Syme's parting speech as he got into the dog-cart and gathered up his reins, "you've married the sweetest girl in Christendom, and the loveliest; and, upon my soul, I think you deserve your luck. I hope you'll be as happy as a king, old boy!" And so this idyllic little tea-party ended with a flourish of congratulation.

By the time Nell and her husband had retraced their steps as far

as the knoll under Hollacomb, evening was approaching. As they halted a moment to look back towards the great hills and the sunset, nature seemed to be spreading a pageant by way of raising further their uplifted hearts. Before them the sky was streaked and slashed with flaming orange; behind them, suffused with tender rose and pearl and opal. Great cumulus clouds, like ranges of alps with shoulders rounded off, hung majestically over the moor to the south, massive and quiet, as though solemnly resting after stress and storm. Below them the river roared, hurling spray over gleaming bowlder and sodden bank, and plunging whitely into the gloom of darkling woods.

"All the color and beauty seem to affect me like organ music to-night," murmured Nell, drawing close to Terence's side.

But he could not respond to her exaltation. The scenery of this Hollacomb gorge oppressed him. But a few months since he had gazed upon just such a flaming sky from an opening in the woods hard by, and heard much the same sentiment expressed in the tones of another woman who loved him. How patronizing he had been to Mary, how good-naturedly he had smiled at her little poetical outburst! Soon, perhaps, she would be back from Lymport, and sooner or later he must face her upbraiding eyes. Terence felt humble and low-spirited at this moment; with Nell beside him, his better self was apt to say harsh things.

"Terence," she said presently, pulling at his arm, "let us go home by the canal, for I'm anxious to see how the water has fared."

"But, my dear child, your feet are wet already; and the canal path will be sodden. We had better get home by the road, which saves a good quarter of an hour."

"No, no; I must see the canal. It is not ten minutes out of the way; and you must give in, for it is such a pleasure to make you obey me!"

Nell laughed with a child's glee as she pressed him canal-wards.

Terence hesitated, but only for a moment. He was anxious to please her, and in the absence of Mary there was no real danger about the route.

"Lead on, then, ye persuasive little witch," he cried. "Sure I'll follow ye to the other end of the world!"

A short climb up a steep lane brought them onto the canal-path. Upon reaching it, they halted, struck with amazement. The prophecy of the old man at the town bridge was fulfilled: the water had run off, the bed of the canal lay bare to the sky, save for a sullen pool here and there.

"I never could have believed it!" cried Nell, "especially with your opinion to back me."

"Well, it's a snub for me, and no mistake. But come, little girl, let us hurry home; it is dismal enough among these dripping trees."

They trudged on accordingly, the orange clouds burning away to chocolate and drab, the evening fog rising fast. They soon reached the ivied bridge below Hollacomb Farm, and Terence hastened his steps, anxious to put behind him this trysting-place with its atmosphere of love-vows broken and passion grown cold.

They had actually passed the bridge, when something prompted him to look back over his shoulder. In doing so, he stopped suddenly; his face went ashen gray; a low, shuddering cry escaped him.

"What is it? Terence, dearest husband, you frighten me! . . . O God, help her! How pitiful, how pitiful!"

Nell's heart stopped; for a moment she groped in the air for support, while the horror and pathos of what she saw sank into her brain. For close to the gray old bridge, among broken brown reeds and trodden leaves and twigs and gravel left by the flood, lay a silent, pitiful thing that had once been a woman. Nell knew at once that she was dead, for the face was visible. Yet she called upon the figure by its name, as though the lifeless clay could answer.

"Mary, Mary!" she wailed. "Oh, speak to me—Mary, poor Mary!"

Yet, stricken as she was with pity and horror, Nell was too well accustomed to look on death, thanks to experiences among the poor, to lose control of herself for more than a moment or two. She stepped down the muddy bank; then with trembling hands raised the poor head upon her knee, and put aside the dripping hair, while her tears fell fast upon the face that could never more feel caress of love nor warmth of human touch.

"Oh, Terence, come and help me! I can't bear her to lie here—poor, poor Mary!"

But Terence could neither move nor speak. The sudden horror seemed to have frozen his faculties. He stood propped against an alder-trunk, rigidly staring at the pool under the old bridge. For the present thought could articulate but one word—"Suicide."

"She must have fallen in somewhere near the farm and been carried down by the flood," murmured Nell, stroking the dead cheek reverently.

Terence made a strained effort to speak; but one word would come from him. "Suicide," he muttered; then sank down to the roots of the alder, reclining against the trunk.

"Never, never!" said Nell, earnestly. "Why should you accuse poor Mary? She was the happiest of girls, the last in the world to commit such a crime; it has been a sad accident—no more."

"Accident?" as he clutched at the word and repeated it, his voice came back to him. "Yes, yes, you're right, Nell, an accident. I never thought of that. I only knew her by sight, and thought perhaps—"

He hardly knew what he was saying. Instinct was urging him to lie; but reason had not yet told him in what direction to begin.

Nell was distressed for her husband. She knew him for a soft-hearted man—so much so, indeed, that the practice of his profession was often a torture to him—and here was another proof of the tenderness of his nature. She urged him not to mind her, pointing out that some laborer on his way home would probably be passing soon.

This suggestion roused Terence. He called upon his failing will, stiffened himself, and stood upright. Very soon the sound of approaching footsteps struck upon his ear, and seemed to put firm ground under him in a moment. Fear revived him like some magic elixir.

The footsteps were those of Simon Secretan, who was at this moment searching for Mary. Not a day had passed lately without his seeing her; but her seeming quietness had allayed his first fears concerning her. Upon coming to the farm about an hour since, however, and learning from her father that she had not been home for some time, he had felt uneasy; and when a careful search through her favorite haunts had failed to discover her, his uneasiness deepened into alarm.

For a little incident had occurred the day before, which, without impressing him much at the time, seemed now to have a possibly terrible significance.

Simon was watching the flooded canal with Mary, when a heavy billet of wood came floating past.

"Now, I wonder," said Mary, carelessly, "whether that log will be borne on into the Culmer, and finally carried far out to sea by the broad river?"

"Probably it might. Why do you ask, Mary?"

"Just from passing curiosity. It struck me that the log might

be so borne away, and the owner, searching for his lost property, might never know what had become of it. Probably no one will ever set eyes on it again, you think?"

"I dare say not."

The incident, together with Mary's words, took more and more hold of Simon's mind as his search continued; and his forebodings increased steadily until, by the time he reached the bridge, he had almost given up hope of finding her anywhere alive.

Thus the scene on the canal-bank was but half a surprise to the searcher. He took it in at a single glance. Terence was standing under the alder, working himself up to face the coming intruder. Nell was still crouching under the bank with the dead girl across her knees.

Simon's look was strange and solemn as he stepped down beside her; but Nell was struck by the absence of amazement in it. His expression was rather that of one who finds a mournful expectation fulfilled than of one confronted by an unexpected tragedy. Not a word did he speak, but he took up Nell's burden gently and bore it away to the farm.

Terence's slender hope had gone now; Simon's face had killed it.

"He knows all. He must have been in her confidence, and have expected this. Mary has betrayed me to Simon; I'm utterly at his mercy; he could ruin me by a single word."

Thus he mused while Nell stood watching Simon's departing figure.

"Terence," she said, after a pause, "I feel so ill and shaken, and so chilled with sitting there in the wet, that I hardly know how I shall get home; and you look quite unhinged yourself, dear?"

"Unhinged? My dear Nell, you must be bad indeed to talk such nonsense as that. Of course I was a trifle shaken at first—who wouldn't be? But that has all passed long ago; feel how steady my hand is. I wish you wouldn't talk at random like that. However, you're not well, dear, and I ought not to speak so crossly to you. Come on, little wife, I'm as steady as a rock, and will carry you the whole way home if necessary. But first you must try and walk off the chill—come, be quick, dear, for you look perfectly frozen, and need a fast walk to restore your circulation."

CHAPTER XX

Some two weeks had passed, and Chillington was still seething with the tragic death of Mary Pethick.

As to the cause of her death there was no room for serious doubt, no loop-hole for kind-hearted coroner's jurymen to ease their feelings by such phrases as "misadventure," "unsound mind," or anything else of a softening description. When, after a prolonged sitting, they took their hats and sticks from the parlor-table at Hollacomb Farm and clattered out of the room, they had passed the only verdict possible in face of the evidence, medical and other, laid before them. It was the old, old story of wrong and shame, with the old miserable climax, and there was an end of it.

Dr. Clancy and his wife had not been called upon to give evidence. Mrs. Clancy, indeed, was ill in bed, and unable to attend the inquest, and Simon Secretan was able to speak to the finding of the body, the position in which it lay, and other such details.

Mr. Secretan came in for a good deal of blame in that, knowing the girl's condition, and half-suspecting her to be contemplating suicide, he had taken no definite steps to prevent the catastrophe. He had always, however, possessed a special faculty for the accretion to himself of any blame that might be awaiting a pair of shoulders to settle upon.

But the coroner's verdict and subsequent funeral had not brought the subject to a natural close. Under ordinary circumstances the tide of public excitement would have turned at this point, ebbing gradually away in casual gossips, regretful reminiscences, and denunciation of the girl's betrayer. In the present case, however, there was a special feature that served to keep public opinion almost at fever pitch—viz., that the author of the mischief remained undiscovered.

It seemed strange, even to the point of exasperation, that no one could put his finger upon the man for whom so much obloquy was ready and waiting. It was agreed that he must be a man of some position, as well as a specious rogue, for Mary never could bear to look at a common fellow. She had always held her head high; in-

somuch that few were surprised at her succumbing under the torture of her coming shame. Many said harsh things of her, and the voice of uncharity is always pitched high; but there was also a strong current of sympathizing regret, of kindly excuse for the good-hearted girl, who had always been liked in spite of her airs and whims. Verily, should the culprit be discovered, he were in danger of rough handling; indeed, the guilty unknown was never mentioned by the young men of Chillington without some hard cursing and promises of heavy punishments. Terence Clancy had to listen to a score of such tirades during a single morning's rounds.

It was a tribute to Ezekiel Doidge that not a soul ever mentioned his name—though his arrogance had made an enemy of every second man in the place—in connection with the mystery. As for Dr. Clancy, they would as soon have thought of charging him with the ill-doing as of indicting the vicar himself. No one had seen him even speak to Mary, so cautious and circumspect had the dread of Ezekiel always made him.

Yet, after some days, the tongue of rumor began to busy itself—not openly, but in whispered conclaves behind parlor doors—with a name greater than that of Terence Clancy; one that ranked only second in importance, from the town's point of view, to that of Lord Bridistow, the reigning peer of the district—with the name, in short, of the future Sir Simon Secretan. People were ashamed to speak in public against one of such blameless reputation and high position; but ugly whispers and innuendoes were crawling like serpents up and down the by-lanes of Chillington.

Terence knew that it was so, and the knowledge made his life a nightmare, while narrowing day by day the precipice-path which he seemed to be treading.

Simon, who must surely now be a deadly enemy, knew of his guilt. The single glance this once-friend had thrown at him while lifting the dead girl from Nell's knees was not to be misinterpreted. Yet, knowing the man as he did, Terence would have felt his secret almost safe—having the conviction that Simon might think fit to punish him in some private way, but would never betray him to professional ruin—save only in one eventuality, the very one which seemed now drawing on; to wit, the necessity of being compelled to clear his own character by pointing out the real offender.

Nor did the probability of public disgrace and professional ruin make up the sum of Terence's distraction at this time; for behind

the fear of these lay a deeper one, that of a private avenger. There was Ezekiel Doidge to be reckoned with.

"I used to think he would do me some injury if he were even to catch me talking with Mary," thought Terence; "but now! . . . Let him find out the truth now, and I believe from the bottom of my soul that he'll murder me. I wish to God he was in the only place fit for him—a mad-house!"

Finally, by way of last straw to Terence's burden of anxiety, there was Nell's serious illness. She had caught a dangerous chill while lingering by the canal that night, and the shock and strain to the nerves had aggravated it. Upon reaching home she had been put to bed, and had remained there ever since, nursed by Terence and her sister Kate, in a low feverish condition which alarmed her husband not a little.

Nor had Terence a single free hour wherein to sit down and fairly confront the tangled situation. Patients were pouring in upon the new doctor until he hardly knew which way to turn. He was overworked, distracted, harassed almost beyond human endurance. The strain was telling heavily upon his health already. He wondered how much longer he would be able to stand up under the pressure of accumulating trouble.

At length, about the middle of the third week after the inquest, Terence felt that he could no longer bear up without a word of advice or help from some human soul; and, further, that he must either think out some plan of escape from the increasing danger of Simon's being forced to expose him, or collapse altogether. It was not in his nature to fight a thing through unpropped—with the grim fortitude that a man whose ways are at all crooked finds the need of sooner or later. Tell out his troubles he must; and he had good hope of at least moderating Simon's anger, if not of getting some help from him—could he but dare to face him.

Coming home from his rounds that day, he found Nell worse than usual, and with temperature dangerously high. Kate attended to him, as she had done lately, with sisterly kindness. She insisted upon his sitting down to dinner, vowing that he was over-anxious about Nell's state; that she could remember her being in much the same low condition after a severe wetting on the moor some three or four years ago, and so on. Terence listened and was really grateful, but could eat nothing. He went up and sat with Nell for an hour, and was somewhat relieved when she at length dropped off into a quiet sleep. Then he stole from the room, ordered the least tired

of his two horses, and told Kate he was in for a long moorland ride. She begged him to send Mr. Syme. He said he had promised a patient to ride over himself, and go he must. He had made up his mind to face Simon, to throw himself upon the mercy of the most generous man he knew.

It was a relief to find himself in the saddle, with the prospect before him of putting an end to torturing suspense. While dreading the meeting with Simon, his fear was laced with hope that some definite good would come of it—perhaps even the respite or breathing-space for which he craved. Were Simon a person of but fair average magnanimity, the proposed appeal were but wasted breath. But Terence well knew the heart of the man who had been to him as a brother—was convinced that no appeal to Simon could be looked upon as a mere forlorn-hope. He had played the treacherous friend to him, yet hoped; had requited his exceeding generosity by robbing him, yet still hoped. Perhaps this hope of Terence Clancy's was as high a tribute as a man not yet much appreciated by his fellows could well have received.

Yet the exaltation produced by the mere hope of a respite was a measure of Clancy's wretchedness. His prospects were black and dreary as a winter's night; he was very near to despair. Even should the plan, now in his mind, of escape from the neighborhood succeed, there was nothing to be looked for but grinding poverty—his old state—to be faced not alone this time, but with a delicately nurtured wife beside him, with her respect for him perhaps undermined, the spring of her love dried up. Terence felt the power that lay in this very wretchedness. He would lay bare his heart to Simon—would borrow such eloquence from despair as had never come to him yet.

As soon as he had cleared the town and topped the hill above the railway station he drove the spurs into Rosalind and galloped forward like a madman.

"Throw me head-foremost against the stone-wall, mavourneen!" he cried, leaning over the mare's neck, "and maybe ye'll do me the greatest service in the power of horse or man. Break me neck, and the worry'd be over, dear; and sure ye'd finish off a worthless fellow who was born to ruin every one that loves him!"

Rosalind was presently pulled up, sweating and quivering, before the one ale-house owned by Monks Damerel hamlet. Terence turned in the saddle, uttering a long sigh of relief, when, upon raising his eyes to the great moorland ridge on his right, he saw a light twinkling.

"My beacon-light," he muttered, "that points to my only harbor of refuge."

The light shone from Simon's observatory, where, the night being moonless, with the winter stars throbbing brightly through the thinnest of mist, Terence had counted upon finding him. Cheered by the fulfilment of this expectation, Terence now got rid of his horse and at once entered upon the steep climb that lay before him.

The long, stiff ascent proved a more severe task than Terence had expected. The strain of much overwork and worry which he had lately undergone had so unfitted him for physical exertion that he toiled upward with great difficulty, and had several times to throw himself at full length upon the damp heather in order to recruit his forces. It took him a full hour to reach the level of the observatory, and, when he at length found himself tapping at the door, he was in a thoroughly exhausted condition.

In fact, when Simon appeared, much amazed at receiving a visitor of any sort at his solitary workshop, Terence was too evidently in a bad way for a humane man to think of anything but trying to assist him.

"Come in and sit down, Terence, while I get you some brandy-and-water."

Simon never thought to address him so familiarly, but the words came of their own accord.

Terence turned his head aside, saying not a word. The kindness of Simon's voice upset him; a harsher reception would have been more bracing, though less hopeful.

Simon threw open a cupboard and quickly set a glass of brandy-and-water on the table beside his visitor; but he, too, seemed unable to begin a conversation. It was a strange meeting.

By way of giving the other a few minutes in which to recover himself, Simon then went and stood at the open door, looking down over the combe and the hamlet with its twinkling lights.

When he closed the door and turned again into the room, Terence began to speak in a low voice, his head still averted, his hands fumbling among the papers scattered on the table.

"You can guess that I'm pretty low, or I shouldn't have come to force myself upon you thus. I'm not quite mean enough to wish to flaunt my happiness in your face—if I had any; but, rather, I want to lay myself bare to you, to spread myself out before you. You're bound to judge me hardly; but—but will you hear my defence, such as it is?"

Secretan had wished to see no more of the man who had requited him so ill, never to listen to his soft persuasive voice again; but Terence's evident trouble and shame, his deliberate placing of himself as it were in the dock and appealing as prisoner to judge, wrought upon him strongly. He moved uneasily in his chair, then muttered:

"Go on; but don't look upon me as your judge."

Terence raised his head, looked fully at the other, and spoke on, with his heart in his voice:

"Jack Syme first put it into my head to cut you out, to win Nell and her money. I scouted the notion. I swear to you I had no thought of treachery when you first introduced me to her and took me up to Moor Gates. I was so free from any thought of wronging you that I had no fear for myself. You took me up there day after day, and still I never suspected myself. I don't know when the thought of love first came into my head; it crept into me, stole upon me unawares, had fast hold of me before I dreamed of anything to be fought against. Then I tried to shake myself free. I denied you many times, as you'll remember, when you wished to take me up there. But I was weak, and so drifted on and on; and that fatal two weeks under the same roof with her were too much for me. The fever seized us both; I was not hero enough to resist, as you would have done."

The speaker was desperately in earnest. Simon knew well that he was telling the truth—at least, in so far as it is given a man to tell it when reviewing his own conduct and motives.

"As for Mary, you'll think me a common libertine, who compassed her ruin and never gave her a thought afterwards. That's what all Chillington will be saying of me soon. I don't know a soul but yourself who, once I'm found out, would endure to let me mention her name or say a word in my own defence. Even you can't understand my weakness; you never can conceive what a curse to a man this weakness is, how it scorches up every good intention like a flame. You're strong yourself; you want no props, nor woman's comfortings when things go wrong with you. I'm made of poorer stuff, weaker stuff — baser stuff, if you will, than you, Simon. I fled to Mary for comfort in my trouble about Nell. Her flattery and admiration soothed a vain, weak fool like me. I thought to love her truly, to forget Nell in her, to make her my wife. I meant well and did badly, and now my punishment is but half begun. But believe one thing of me: I never knew how things were; I never guessed her trouble; I never suspected it till I saw her lying dead by the

canal, and wished myself dead beside her. Simon," he continued, leaping to his feet and stretching out both hands with a passionate gesture, "had I known all, I'd have gone back to her and made her my wife. I swear to you I'd have left Nell at the church door, aye, at the altar steps, rather than have brought shame and death on that poor girl!"

Terence sank back into his chair, and bowed his head upon his hands; and Simon's voice was unsteady.

"I believe you, old fellow; you were always good-hearted enough. I've judged you too hardly."

"O God, help me!" groaned Terence, miserably; "how shall I ever tell this to Nell? When she knows that even while I was making love to her— Man, man, she'll hardly endure me in her presence —my bride, my sweet wife! I dread her scorn more than all the shame and ruin that are before me."

"Surely 'ruin' is too strong a word. It seems to me that in this mean world a man's vices tend rather to further his prospects than not. It is one's efforts to do good, to help and elevate others, that damn one in the estimation of one's neighbors. Look at me; there's not a more unpopular man in the county. Had I been a jolly rake, with an oath and a pint of liquor for every one, they would have liked me long ago. Why," Simon added under his breath, "with a few redeeming touches of the blackguard about me, I might have won *her* love, or even my father's!"

This bitter speech, so curiously unlike his former self, showed whither Simon's solitary broodings were leading him. Terence was surprised to hear him, and shook his head decisively, saying:

"I see how it is. You've rushed from your old optimism into the opposite extreme, and both extremes are wrong. Among fast people, perhaps, in a great city, my errors might easily be forgiven; but here, never. Once I'm found out, no one will dare to employ me in the face of public opinion. My only hope is to sell your gift, the practice, before the storm breaks, and begin the struggle again at the other end of the kingdom, or, better still, in America. Yet, wherever I go, there'll be a black mark against me. My sun has set, Simon; I can never hold up my head in the profession again. Mr. Tredethlyn will, I dare say, see that we don't starve; but that's as much help as I ever expect from him. But listen," he continued, in an anxious, husky voice, "there's only one man living that can help me—the one from whom I've the least right to hope for anything, yet the one from whom I hope everything—'tis yourself, Simon!"

"In the name of wonder, what can I do?"

"Listen! There's a whisper going up and down Chillington that *you* are the guilty man."

Simon sprang from his chair, laughing loud and discordantly.

"What! am I, then, in danger of becoming a popular character?" he shouted.

But Terence proceeded steadily, emphasizing each sentence with his hand.

"This insane hypothesis of theirs, which must have arisen from your being seen with poor Mary, might keep them quiet for a few weeks—for long enough to permit of my agent in town getting something for the practice. Whereas, if the storm once broke, there would be no practice to sell; any medical man might come down and sweep the whole district at his will without the necessity of spending a penny. Yet my appeal lies on far stronger grounds than this. You know that Nell is ill in bed, so weak and feverish as to cause me serious anxiety? As it is, I fear for her life, Simon; but what would be her state were the story of my wrong-doing to be suddenly flung in her face now? I believe the shock would kill her outright. I'm certain that, even were she to survive it, her health would be shattered for many years. It drives me half mad to think how she will suffer. Oh, Simon, I have one death on my conscience already; for God's sake, don't let me have Nell's, too! I've done ill, I deserve a heavy punishment, but must I lose *her?* Give me a week or two; let me escape from this accursed place, and I'll give my whole life to working and scheming for her happiness, and sooner or later, whenever my courage returns to me, I will kneel to her and confess the wrong I did, and love will teach her how to forgive me. Help me, for her sake, Simon! I only dare to ask it for her sake!"

"Man, man, you only bewilder me! *What* do you ask?"

"*Your silence*—for a few days only—no more than that. Let the rumors against you run their course for a day or two; take no step to vindicate yourself. Tell them the truth the moment I'm gone—not till then."

"God's truth, man! would you have me silent if I'm accused outright?"

"For her sake—for her sake! Only for a day—week. After that, tell the worst of me. I'll leave a confession in writing that will clear you at once and forever."

"I'll have nothing to do with such a cursed lie. I'll never be a party to my own dishonor!"

"Not a soul would dare to accuse you openly; you have only to let the gossip-mongers mutter away for a few days. It is my only chance. But I see 'tis too much to ask of you, Simon; God knows I've no vestige of right to do so. I'm a poor miserable devil ruined by one false step; with none to help, no refuge to turn to; with nothing before me but public disgrace and the scorn of the woman I love. I'm too much of a wreck to be worth the trouble of rescuing, least of all by the friend whom I have injured. It's nothing that I meant no harm, that I'd have given my soul to save poor Mary, had I but known in time. I shall be posed before them all as a cold, deliberate, wicked libertine, who encouraged the girl to make an end of herself in order to get myself out of the difficulty. I shall be hooted and cursed out of the place. Nell will never bear to live under the same roof with me; she'll go home to her father. Well, well, 'tis no use keeping you here all night listening to my raving. Maybe I'll drag on somehow, maybe I'll muster courage to cut it short with a dose of poison. Anyhow, I'll pester you no more. Give me another liquor, old fellow—'tis the last request I'll ever make of you."

Simon pushed over the decanter mechanically, then fell to striding to and fro, muttering to himself, "A horrible idea! to sit down and let them tear my character to pieces! Yet what do I care for any one's opinion? My father would suffer, were the evil report to get round to him. Yet, would he suffer? Wouldn't it be rather a satisfaction to him to find me even baser than he had imagined? I think it would pain Nell, yet not one-thousandth part as much as would the discovery of the true culprit. Not a soul here but would a dozen times rather hear ill of me than of popular Terence. And it would be something to save Nell from this blow. With my help, the hardest thing that could well befall her might be averted. Once safely out of this place, *he* would manage to keep it from her; he has cunning enough for a shrewder task than that. Whom would it vex to hear of my fall? One or two would be sorry, the one or two who respect me, such as Frank Nelson, Bridistow, Julius Rush —ah, and Kate. But she wouldn't believe it. I think she's the one living person that knows me well enough to say, 'Tis a lie!' And, at the worst, the stigma could not rest upon me for many days." And so this quixotic cynic went on brooding and arguing, seemingly unable to come to a decision either one way or the other.

Terence had the wisdom to sit silent while the mental struggle progressed, for he knew that were Simon really minded to take this,

the most insane and reckless step of his lifetime, he would do so without further persuasion. And as the time went by the anxious watcher's hope grew to a certainty. He might have to wait long, perhaps for many hours, but something told him that, by the time he was again in the saddle, his point would have been gained, and Simon's promise given—the promise of one who had never learned to break his word.

CHAPTER XXI

Probably there is nothing in the whole universe, material or spiritual, of elasticity so miraculous as a sanguine man's hope; nor would a year's search in a crowded land reveal a more naturally sanguine man than Terence Clancy.

When he descended to breakfast next morning half his mental clouds were dispersed; the sly gleam was returning to his eye, the vivid color to his cheek.

"I hardly know you this morning," cried Kate, as he shook hands with her. "And certainly I needn't ask after our patient?"

"She's better, Kate, much better; with pulse and temperature both approaching the normal. What a jolly bright morning it is, to be sure! I'll be riding round with a dry jacket to-day anyway."

He sat down to breakfast with a good appetite, and quickly inoculated Kate with his good spirits. None so cheery and charming as Terence in a good mood; none with a prettier knack of forestalling a woman's wants, giving her an impression that he is really thinking of her as well as himself—a habit which differentiates a man from the rest of his sex, and invests him with the kind of attraction that belongs to a white hare or a black swan.

To Kate, accustomed to Mr. Tredethlyn's digestive woes and bland indifference to the world outside his own waistcoat, her brother-in-law's thoughtful little gallantries appealed strongly this morning. She was beginning reluctantly to admit that Nell's infatuation for this man was not so blankly incomprehensible, after all.

"As Nell is really better, I must send a line over to my father; and I shall ask him to pass on the good news to Simon, who will doubtless have heard of and been anxious about her illness."

So said Kate, who was well aware that Simon's name was tabooed at the White House, but who always made a point of ignoring the whims and weaknesses of other people. She was now surprised, however, by Terence's cordial acceptance of her proposition.

"Certainly, certainly; Simon should be told of our patient's im-

provement. What a fine old fellow he is, old Simon! I wish, Kate, I do wish," he added, with feeling, "that my happiness had been won at some enemy's expense, instead of good old Simon's."

It was the first time Kate had heard him speak in this strain, and it warmed her heart yet more towards Terence.

He continued to speak kindly and admiringly of Simon, for it eased his conscience somewhat to do so; to eulogize his benefactor seemed to lighten the burden of his obligation in some measure. What did he not owe to this good friend? Simon had last night given his word to be silent for a month—one whole month. In four weeks a dozen opportunities might arise. The hue-and-cry might die out ere long in the ordinary course of things, and meanwhile its energy would be expended in a wrong direction.

Terence recalled with comfort the story of Alcibiades and his dog. How the astute Greek had cut his favorite animal's tail, to the end that his enemies, having a small thing to fasten upon, might fail to notice large ones. Chillington, he thought, in hot pursuit of Simon Secretan, would never dream of thinking about himself. They had not merely a small thing to occupy their eager tongues, but a stately quarry to hunt down. As to whether the quarry might suffer in the chase, why, that was an awkward question. But—but Simon was known for a very proud man; doubtless he would keep aloof and scorn backbiters. And again, the hue-and-cry could not possibly last long. Some other scandal would certainly crop up in due course; in fine, Terence had serious hopes that he would, after all, be able to retain his practice and his position, and continue to show a bold front to the world.

Yet there was one dark cloud yet undispersed—the dread of Ezekiel Doidge. Terence felt that this man would now become little better than a monomaniac; that his one object in life would be to find out and bitterly punish his sweetheart's betrayer. That he was seemingly quiet now, going about his business as usual, keeping his schemes, if he had any, to himself, rather added to Terence's alarm. Doidge was the one person he really feared, the only one who would persist when public opinion had cooled down, and ceased to trouble itself about a victim.

The question of how to hoodwink this dangerous foe was occupying Terence as he strolled to and fro under his veranda after breakfast, when a maid approached him with this message:

"There's some one a-waitin' for you in the consultin'-room, sir—Mr. Doidge, from Chillington mill."

In a moment a fresh brood of fears swept down upon Terence and staggered him.

"Let him take a seat, and I will come immediately." He got these few words out with difficulty.

The maid noticed his pallid looks, but put them down to anxiety about her mistress. She and the cook had been but three days in the house, yet both were already under the spell of Terence's fascination. It was his lot to be loved almost at sight by men, women, and children alike.

The moment Jane disappeared, Terence entered by the French window, and sat down in the breakfast-room to recover himself. But his sickness of heart resisted all argument. He was in deadly fear. He could not persuade himself but that Doidge had come to denounce him—or worse.

Finding that delay only helped to unman him, he went palpitating down the stairs, and hovered palpitating outside the consulting-room door.

"He may have chanced upon some clew," his white lips muttered. "He may be violent—he may kill me before I can summon help. I will never face him unarmed again, if—if I but come safely off this time."

At that moment Jack Symes's noisy whistle came down the passage from the surgery, and Terence could have asked no sweeter music. It nerved him to turn the handle and face his enemy.

Doidge's friendly greeting brought such a revulsion of feeling that Terence's brain whirled. At first he could hardly tell what the man said or how he looked.

"Lord bless me, sir, I reckon you're as much in want of medicine as I be!"

"I've been overworked lately, Mr. Doidge, and have had little sleep; and my wife's illness has made me anxious."

"I hope she'm better, doctor."

"Thanks, yes; Mrs. Clancy is much better this morning."

"That's well; us 'd be terrible sorry if she was to be laid up for long."

"You are very good. But about yourself—you've come to consult me?"

Terence could now venture upon a good look at his patient; he liked what he saw but little.

Doidge had the strained look that speaks to "the perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart." His pale face was a little flushed, his

cheeks deeply sunken; his eyes looked strange, with a gleam of dry, fierce triumph in them, a kind of haggard joy, as of a worn-out man who draws near to a wished-for goal.

The doctor quickly gathered that the man's nervous system was thoroughly unhinged, and his mind in much the same condition. While examining him physically, he held his patient in conversation without difficulty; indeed, poor Doidge was too much excited to support silence, had it been desired.

His talk was chiefly of the gathering to be held in the town-hall next evening for the purpose of inaugurating the new cricket club. From that subject he seemed unable to disentangle his mind for a moment.

This concentration of his thoughts upon a subject that could hardly possess much innate interest for him—seeing that his offer of a piece of meadow-land had some time since been refused by the embryo club in favor of Mr. Secretan's proffered site, and that the club was in fact a creation of Simon's—was somewhat strange. It might have alarmed Terence, had not his thoughts for the present been strongly drawn in another direction. But for the moment he was all medical man; there were points in this patient's physical condition that puzzled him. Allowing for the man's morbid mental state, for the severe emotional strain lately put upon him, for some constitutional weakness easily discernible, there remained an unaccountable something, a dark corner in which Terence's subtle mind was at present blindly groping.

From student days Clancy had always shown a marked talent for diagnosis. A famous physician, under whom he had been fortunate enough to serve at St. Bartholomew's, had once said to him: "As far as talent goes, you have the promise of a career before you. You possess a rare faculty of sound analysis, combined with keen intuitive perception—the man's gift wedded to the woman's. But, remember, talent without *character* is a haftless blade; stiffen your character, youngster; brace your will to face the first ten years of drudgery, and you'll one day be a great physician."

Terence's double talent was hard at work now. Intuition had leaped at something, and was now waiting for analysis to prove foot by foot the ground which had been cleared at a bound.

"You're a hard-exercise man, I believe, Mr. Doidge?" asked the doctor, in a conversational way, as he withdrew the stethoscope. "Do you over exert yourself sometimes?"

"Are you talking of exercise? Well, yes, I'm not exactly a loafer.

But I haven't had my strength for some time; can't throw the sacks about and shame the lazy hounds o' mine as I used sometimes."

"I wouldn't overtask myself, if I were you. You're a bit out of sorts just now—nerves out of order, and that sort of thing. You should rest and avoid all excitement for a week or two. I'll send you a nerve sedative, and other medicine to follow."

"Pshaw! as if I didn't know all that!" cried Doidge, rudely. "The very thing I've come here for is to be wound up for to-morrow evening. I want to sleep to-night for an hour or two, just for a change, and get fit for—what I have to do."

Clancy's mind swung back suddenly from far-reaching vistas of speculation to the plain hard ground of personal interest and safety. His fears were alert again in a moment. What did this man mean by his—"what I have to do?"

"Give me something to screw me up," cried the patient, in a peremptory tone. "I'm all of a shake, and there's a stiff job before me."

"Drop it, whatsoever it be; you're not fit for any excitement."

"I will be fit; if you can't give me a screw-up, damme, I'll go to another doctor!"

"Go where you please, my good fellow; every honest doctor would give you a similar warning."

"You'm right, sir; you'm right. I'm all unhinged-like; you mustn't heed what I say. Will you give me a sleeping-draught o' some sort? I *must* sleep to-night, for I'm bound to be present at the cricket meetin'. My heart's set on that, for there's work for me to do. More than that I won't say at present—and I reckon you'll be in the hall yourself, doctor? The whole place 'll be there, you see, and pretty nigh the whole neighborhood, too, from Lord Bridistow down to the smallest farmer. They say this will be the crack club o' the county, and perhaps give a big lift to county cricket. Yes, the whole district will be gathered in our town-hall to-morrow night, mister—and I'll be among them, if I have to be carried there on a shutter!"

This speech sounded a fresh clang of alarm for Terence. Was it, then, just as he had feared? Was this wretched man actually brewing some scheme of vengeance, hugging it close, so as to hit the harder when he did speak? Clancy was absolutely in the dark as to what clew, or fancied clew, the crazy fellow possessed; he might turn and rend any one. It was only clear that he was upon a wrong scent at present.

After some further desultory conversation, Doidge left the house abruptly, jumped into his high-wheeled gig, and drove furiously away. From the west window of his consulting-room Terence watched him rattle down the steep hill to the town at breakneck speed.

"No hope of that," muttered the watcher, with dry lips. "No hope of his coming to smash, I suppose? Fate will be careful to preserve him as an instrument of torture for a poor devil like me, who never gets a chance of going straight!"

CHAPTER XXII

The town-hall of Chillington was an ancient granite structure supported upon arches, having on one side of it the market-place, on the other a broad open space of gravel. As you came down the steep hill leading from the railway station, and paused on the bridge for a patronizing glance at the little town, the old hall made a good note in the picture, being well in accord, as regards size, style, and color, with its surroundings. A stranger of moderate enthusiasm might quite well venture to pronounce it "respectable," and the townsfolk would be much chagrined at so lukewarm a verdict.

The uses and functions of the building were manifold. It would serve as a concert-room for the Amateur Musical Society one night, for a religious gathering the next; for a public sale in the afternoon, a private ball in the evening. Every one with any pretensions to be a public character had stumbled through a few halting sentences in the big room over the pillars; indeed, its stage had been trodden by the shivering amateurs, musical, dramatic, and other, of several generations. Of the well-known voices uplifted from time to time in the town-hall, none was more popular with an audience than Mr. Tredethlyn's. Standing upon this familiar platform, with a Chillington gathering spread out before him in one broad smile, the squire-parson was at his best. He was trammelled neither by Mr. Secretan's intensity, nor the vicar's nervousness, nor Lord Bridistow's dearth of words; so that every one used to go away the more cheerful for his sly jokes and genial home-thrusts, that gave each in turn the laugh over his neighbor. And the excitement of public speaking always had a good effect upon his liver.

Mr. Tredethlyn, as it happened, was to be the principal speaker at the cricket meeting mentioned in the last chapter. He was to publicly accept, on behalf of the committee, Secretan's gift of a cricket-ground; gracefully thank Mr. Doidge for his equally kind offer, with a neat side glance or two at the fine public spirit so often exhibited by him; and afterwards to praise and thank every one who expected it—that is to say, every one who had moved hand, foot, or tongue in the interests of the embryo club. A man needs a good

deal of simplicity, or good-nature, or hypocrisy—or perhaps all three in combination—to spread individual praise in this lavish manner, while at the same time tickling the vanity of an entire audience, and keeping up his own dignity; but our parson was quite equal to the task assigned him by the universal voice of the district.

To suit this important occasion the hall had been arranged in a special fashion. As the gathering was to be of a friendly rather than formal character, and as it was thought advisable to allow a certain amount of free discussion among the audience, the chairman was placed, together with his green baize table and bell, about the centre of one side of the long room; while the platform was left unoccupied—an arrangement which put every man on the same level, and tended to promote good-fellowship.

On the chairman's right and left were seated Lord Bridistow, the vicar, Mr. Secretan, and half a dozen other members of the committee; before him was another green table ringed with newspaper reporters, while the remainder of the room was packed with the densest throng that had ever been squeezed into the place; for farm-carts, gigs, and carriages of every description had been streaming into the town for so many hours, that by this time quite a large area of country must have drained itself into Chillington town.

In fact, the inauguration of this new club was an event of prodigious importance, owing partly to the great prowess this year of the county eleven, to which the town furnished a brace of crack bowlers, and the consequent spread of cricketing fervor. Even the ladies had been bitten by the prevailing mania, and clusters of them were now hanging over the flag-trimmed front of the gallery. They had covered the unoccupied platform with flowers, and caused the walls to bloom with such a crop of mottoes, devices, and decorations as the emotional condition of the neighborhood seemed to demand. Had the conventional intelligent foreigner been among them as they gazed upon the thickening throng beneath, he would doubtless have assumed that some question of vast national importance was about to be broached.

When Mr. Tredethlyn's figure rose to its height, and his comely face beamed a welcome to this great audience, the buzzing murmurs ceased. No need for any tapping upon tables or appeals for silence, for every man felt that he was about to hear just what he would have said himself—had he possessed the knack of speaking.

Kate Tredethlyn, looking down at her father—she had left Nell in charge of a friend at her earnest entreaty—felt proud of him as

the smooth, strong current of his speech began to flow. His periods had the ease and quietude of perfect self-confidence, his grip of his hearers was both immediate and firm. When he ceased they all felt that the proceedings had opened perfectly, the right note had been struck. There was warm applause.

As the chairman had encouraged free discussion of one or two moot points, there then followed a desultory debate, with fragmentary speeches put forth here and there by mumbling old men or stammering young gentlemen.

When this had progressed for some time without much advancement of business, Lord Bridistow rose on the chairman's right hand, and plunged with characteristic abruptness into speaking.

His lordship was a square, bluff, ruddy-faced man, much respected not only as the chief magnate of the neighborhood, but as a practical common-sense landlord who lived on his estate, and managed it better than most men. He never pampered his tenants into discontent, as Simon had done long ago, and irretrievably; nor fell into an opposite extreme of severity. There was much sound judgment about Lord Bridistow, though no living soul had ever called him clever. Indeed, he exhibited so few intellectual symptoms that Mrs. French-Chichester—who was nevertheless well-pleased to have him as an ornament to her drawing-room as often as might be—used to say that the taking of his pass degree at Oxford had exhausted his brain forever.

"The soil of his mind!" she would exclaim, when people praised his farming, need never trouble him much; it brought forth just once—but there'll be no rotation of crops *there*, anyway."

"Mr. Chairman, and gentlemen," began his lordship—"and, perhaps I might add, ladies—only the latter can hardly be said to be among us just now; in fact, are quite above our heads, as they're apt to be on most occasions." (Here there was a loud roar from the crowd, with whom a small joke went a long way.) "Your eloquent chairman has just put everything before you in such a—er—what-d'ye-call-'em manner that there isn't much left for me to say. But, judging from your enthusiasm to-night, I should imagine the club has a long life before it. You all know what laurels our noble county has been plucking—er—I mean reaping—this last season, and I think we're mighty proud of our little contribution to the team—our two bowlers." (Tremendous cheering here.) "There's Dick Yelverton, now, has covered us with glory." (Here Yelverton, a sheepish young fellow seated in the front row, was suffused with

blushes, and searched the floor for an opening to dive through.) "I'm bound to praise his skill myself; for when he bowled to me at a net last summer, he took my wicket three times in five balls—and that in my own park, too; his break from the leg broke me altogether."

Lord Bridistow stopped to chuckle here; he liked this joke even better than the other, and felt that he had justified his cordial reception.

"However, I'm getting outside of my brief just now, and must return to business. What I should be speaking of is the captaincy of the new club. You've chosen your committee, decided how often they are to meet—capital fun it is, mapping out other people's tasks, eh?—settled the conditions of membership, and all that; but as yet there has been no mention made of your *captain*—"

"Yourself, my lord! Us would like 'ee for captain right well!" cried several ardent spirits from different parts of the room.

"Myself?—no; couldn't be done, my good fellows; couldn't be done at any price. I live too far off; and there's my own village club to be looked after. I'll name the right man for you in a minute—but of course I'm doing everything topsy-turvy. We haven't even formally accepted Mr. Secretan's offer of a cricket-ground yet; but, as we all have sense enough to accept a present when it falls in our way, that's soon done. Mr. Chairman, shall we have a show of hands?"

Mr. Tredethlyn rose again.

"All you who agree to accept Mr. Secretan's offer hold up your hands."

The room forthwith sprouted with uplifted arms and hands, but there was no attempt at a cheer—not a voice was raised in friendliness or gratitude.

Lord Bridistow, still on his feet, looked uncomfortable and hesitated. He had expected, as a matter of course, some enthusiasm at this point, something to give promise of a cordial vote of thanks, such as he was now about to move. It had not occurred to him that a good fellow like Secretan, for whom he himself had a great liking and respect, and with whose efforts for the public weal he had always been in sympathy, could be other than popular. Nor, indeed, was it in his power to comprehend that inscrutable phenomenon, popularity—a receipt for whose production is upon every man's lips, but within hardly any man's knowledge.

It was not the viscount's habit, however, to shirk a duty, pleas-

ant or the contrary; and his temper was somewhat ruffled at the marked ingratitude of Chillington. He proceeded in a voice somewhat firmer and louder than before:

"I think, gentlemen, we may be apt to take this gift of a good-sized piece of land too much as a matter of course. I, for one, feel on behalf of the town and district particularly grateful for Mr. Secretan's generous present. I have a great admiration for his public spirit. I've known him as a friend for some years, and he's about the only man of my acquaintance who does honestly care about the good of other people. The rest of us get beyond number one when duty calls pretty loud; never without that summons—and always with the expectation of a good, solid return of praise and thanks. If we get no real gratitude, by Jove, we thump and hammer till people pretend a little! That's what I do. Virtue may be its own reward, but that's not good enough for me. Well, now, before moving a cordial vote of thanks to Mr. Secretan, I'm going first to propose him as the most fit, proper, and efficient captain the Chillington Cricket Club could possibly possess—and may we prevail upon him to accept the post!"

At this point Simon rose and coldly asked to be allowed to say a few words. Kate, looking down anxiously from the gallery, knew well what their tenor would be. She understood this proud-humble gentleman better than any one in that crowded room; perhaps she was the only person who understood him at all. Simon would deprecate any thanks for his trifling gift, and flatly refuse the honor of the captaincy.

But Simon was not destined to make even this brief speech; for as he stood looking somewhat haughtily over the heads of his audience, some one on his right also arose, and making his way along the front of the crowd, took up a position beside the reporter's table. It was Ezekiel Doidge.

There was a profound hush in the large hall, for, though the townsfolk were well accustomed to seeing Doidge constantly on his legs at Local Board meetings and the like, objecting, interfering, browbeating everybody, it was felt that something strange was about to happen now; nor could any fail to perceive that the pale stern man who leaned upon the long table was striving to master some stronger passion than any question of this evening could possibly have aroused.

Kate Tredethlyn and several other ladies, wondering at the oppressive silence that had befallen the assembly, craned their necks nerv-

ously over the front of the gallery. The chairman and his immediate neighbors drew their heads together, asking each other in whispers what this peculiar silence might mean. Secretan, after a casual glance at Doidge, reseated himself with the indifferent air of one who cares little about the proceedings one way or the other. Then Doidge's low voice fell hot and quivering upon the silence.

"I suppose I ought to apologize for troubling this large gathering with a personal matter; yet you'll presently see that 'tis a public matter, too, and let no man hinder me, for what I have to say I will say. I'm goin' to speak o' her that was my betrothed wife. But, understand me, I'm not here to stir you up about her sad fate, but only to set before you, as fair as I can, what I know about it, what I haven't yet whispered to a livin' soul. I've kept the secret until this moment because I think my accusation should be set forth in public, answered in public—if any answer there be. I shall make no statement that I wouldn't repeat on oath afore a court o' justice; and as the law o' the land cares naught for the crime that I'm goin' to speak of, I look upon you, my fellow-townsmen and neighbors, as constitutin' the only available tribunal. I shall bear myself afore you as afore a real court, solemnly conscious o' the weight o' the accusation I bring."

The speaker paused for a moment, for self-control grew more difficult as he felt the heart of the large audience beginning to beat with his own. He had spoken slowly, with the strained deliberation of a strong-willed man mastering strong passion, but the heart-flame which underlay his quiet words was spreading through his listeners. Every pair of eyes was glued to the pale working face of the man who seemed to be looking beyond them.

"When it was first borne in upon me," Ezekiel resumed in a voice even lower than before, but which reached all ears, "that she wished to be free, I suspected that some gentleman had been tamperin' with my girl. She—the woman I loved—was true and loyal by natur'; only the subtle flattery of some one above her—with a kind o' claim in her eyes to be as her conscience, to know right an' wrong better than herself, could have wore away her faithfulness. I felt that. I knew as no light temptation could have twisted her so, and I taxed her wi' the name o' the only gentleman that she ever saw much of, and she admitted havin' a weakness towards him. She let me believe—and she always spoke true, always true—as this gentleman had won her heart from me. An' I freed her; resolvin' to watch over and guard her from the danger that I saw ahead.

But I failed in the duty I had set myself. Mayhap, a more vigilant guardian might have saved her from ruin; but there was no mother to watch over her, only a jealous fool—a self-confident jealous fool, who neglected even to warn her father and friends. Well, when she went off to Lymport on a visit, away from home and danger, I breathed free again; but she only answered one o' my letters—and that answer scared me.

"I was gettin' so anxious that, on her return from Lymport, I followed Mary and saw *him* meet her by the canal bridge below Hollacomb Farm. . . . Happen you'll say that I jumped at his guilt too soon, but presently I'm goin' to read you his condemnation writ in her own hand. . . . I'll hurry over what remains to be said. How did I come to be possessed of the letter? I'll tell you that—then read it if I can. After that interview by the canal I scarce left her unwatched an hour; I was always prowlin' about the woods near the farm—and *he* met her most every day. I covered him with my gun once and again—and God knows why I didn't draw trigger. . . . Well, on the morning o' the big flood I was called away up-stream to save some drownin' cattle, and overdid myself over the job, so that I had to bide quiet at home, and couldn't get to use my legs again till the evenin'. Then, by the time I had got half-way down to my usual beat in the Hollacomb woods, young Bob Pethick—that's Mary's cousin, who used mostly to run her messages for her—met me with this letter. He had been in my pay since her return, and was under orders to bring me at once every scrap of writin' that she might intrust to him. Two or three times he had been to my place with the note, and each time found me out. It was directed to *him*—and—and here it is in my hand now. . . ."

A deep thrill passed through the crowd as Doidge tried to steady the fluttering hand which held the paper. The severe strain under which he was laboring oppressed them strangely; but his will still held good, his voice was still steady enough to be heard throughout the hall as he read:

"I thought and hoped never to forgive you—but I could not live hating you. To make excuses for you was my only comfort; and once I gave way to that, allowed myself to think that only Fate had parted us, and that you sometimes grieved for me, I could live over again the happy time when you loved me. But, my love, my love, I can bear it no longer—I cannot face what is now before me. I have no strength left to bear it, and so I send you these last words

—and with them my forgiveness. The kind old canal—my old, old friend—will bear me away to the river, and the river to the sea, and none will know my true story. My father and aunts will be spared that, and poor Ezekiel, too. I think it would half kill *him* to know the worst of me; and he would be a dangerous enemy to you. But have no fears. I have destroyed every scrap of your hand-writing, every trifle that could compromise you; and, lastly, I have so arranged things that my death will seem an accident. My lost love, there will be no breath upon your dear name—it will never be coupled with mine, for none can read what is only written upon my heart. Farewell, my love, my dear love! Grieve for me a little—oh, let me think you will grieve for me a little!"

Ezekiel's voice was harsh and broken for the last few sentences, and he clung to the table for support. Then he straightened himself suddenly and turned upon Secretan, crying, with a snarl like a savage beast's, "*Take your letter—it is yours!*"—and fell senseless upon the floor.

Many had expected to see him fall, it being obvious that the man was laboring with a task beyond his strength. He was lifted and carried into the air without a moment's delay. The throng turned towards him but for a moment as he was carried past, their mental faculties being concentrated upon the gentleman whose arraignment had thus passed suddenly from the stage of whispering in back streets to open denouncement before a public assembly.

"Now, Simon—now!" whispered Kate Tredethlyn between her clinched teeth. "Now stand up and throw back this miserable lie in their faces. Quick—quick! Some of them believe it!"

She uttered a sigh of relief as Simon sprang to his feet, with the words she looked for written clear on his face. He seemed to have been stunned for a moment, but now uprose, his whole figure dilating with the hot wrath of an honorable man falsely accused. Kate panted with anxiety when his hand went out as though to make way for burning words to follow. The next moment she was faint and sick with disappointment.

Simon's eyes, challenging his audience as though daring some one to meet them, lighted upon another pair of eyes, full of piteous appeal, and a white, drawn face upturned to his—the face of the man who had but the other night won his promise of silence. It was the direst moment of Simon's life. He might live to ten times man's allotted span and never know such another. The remembrance of

the promise went through him like a rod of white-hot iron. He could not break it; it was not in him to break his word solemnly plighted. He was scorched, burned up with shame, but forced by the bitter strength of his honor to stand dumbly staring, as the murmurs around him grew to jeers, and angry scorn leaped into all faces.

"Speak, old fellow, for God's sake, and silence them!" cried Lord Bridistow's voice behind him.

But not a word came. Simon stood rigidly facing the storm of denunciation, with ghastly looks that seemed an admission of his guilt.

Jack Syme, leaving Doidge in charge of another doctor, re-entered the room at this moment, and took in the situation with a gloating eye. So complete a triumph over his enemy as this was far above the level of his expectation.

"Gentlemen," he cried, in a strong, firm voice edged with sarcasm, "your intended captain appears to have no answer to make to this accusation. Perhaps he is too proud to speak—too superior to the common herd of us to care about vindicating himself. If so, I believe I shall only give voice to the general sense of this great assembly if I ask him to step down to our level for a moment and speak his mind. He is accused not only of wronging this girl, but of egging her on to make away with herself in order to screen him, or, at any rate, of taking no steps to prevent such a climax. I shouldn't myself care to keep silence under this double indictment; and I think even a gentleman in his high position might condescend to a word or two of explanation. From a man who poses not only as a public benefactor, but as a mender of public morals, we assuredly have a right to expect something better than haughty silence."

This brief speech was received with loud applause. There was a closing in upon the spot where Simon stood, and not a few threatening gestures from those near him.

The threats and upraised hands energized Simon in a moment. He struck his fist upon the table in a spasm of fury, crying aloud:

"I have nothing to say. Take that for an answer, you curs—you curs! Make way for me there!"

They fell back from him right and left as he strode to the door; and not until his eyes were off them did the storm of hisses and jeers break forth again.

CHAPTER XXIII

The proceedings at the town-hall that night made a deep and lasting impression upon Simon. The obloquy he had undergone submerged his mind in bitterness until all its qualities save one were obliterated, like the details of a flooded landscape. There seemed to be nothing of him left standing but his pride. He felt that he was made up of pride and nothing else, as a man with a deep wound seems made up of pain.

The sting of Doidge's accusation was lost in the deeper pang caused by the immediate public acceptance of his guilt. This was the "quick of the ulcer"—the consciousness that his friends and neighbors, whom for years he had been endeavoring to benefit, should be ready at a moment's notice to put him down not only as a heartless libertine of the conventional type, but as a hypocrite whose whole outward life was a lie. He knew nothing of the creeping rumors that had been eating away his good name lately; and he was too hard stricken to appraise judicially the crushing weight of evidence that had been brought against him. As for the direction of Mary's farewell letter to himself, that was easily explained. He had offered to forward any communication she might wish to make to Terence, and had acquiesced in her suggested precaution that Terence's name should appear nowhere in the epistle or its address. For that damning piece of evidence he might thank his own careless good-nature. But Mary's treacherous tampering with his name to Ezekiel—for no one who listened to the man could believe that he was speaking other than the truth as to this—was a piece of meanness which Simon could only add to his general indictment against human nature.

He felt now that he could turn nowhither for justice or even common kindness. The tradesmen and farmers with whom he had dealt so long, the friends whose hands had clasped his a hundred times, were all alike eager to condemn him. Had he spent a lifetime in building up the reputation of a graceless blackguard, they could not have been more speedy or unanimous. He had noticed satisfaction at his disgrace upon many faces. He believed that when his con-

tract with Terence should have been fulfilled, when the real culprit had departed, having confessed the truth in writing, these eager detractors would regret the necessity of admitting his innocence. Such was the natural attitude of a mind thrown out of poise by this unexpected blow.

All the next day Simon spent up in his observatory or striding over the moor, nursing his wrath and drugging his sick pride with cynical aphorisms. In order to be independent and uninterrupted he took food enough with him to last till nightfall, and the moment he returned from tramping the moorland, locked himself into the observatory, resolving to be deaf to all knocking.

But no one came near him; and though it accorded exactly with both wish and expectation, this desertion by his friends aggravated his bitterness. As the long day wore on and never a knock made itself heard, his heart was like lead. He passed from hot indignation to sullen brooding. Terence, at least, might surely have come to thank the man who was suffering in his stead. So he said to himself; yet instinct whispered that Terence would certainly avoid him like poison, would slink about dreading to meet him at every turn, fearing—even after last night's proof of good faith—lest he should repudiate his quixotic bargain.

"Terence is nothing but a poor craven," he mused, "and not for a moment worth the sacrifice. But then—there's Nell."

He fell to reflecting on Nell's future. Terence was right; last night's experience had fully justified his forecast as to the professional ruin which discovery must bring upon him in this neighborhood. And to a man of his poor fibre this must mean, as Simon clearly perceived, life-ruin also. Terence had none of the stiffness necessary for a stand-up fight with adversity. Were the practice to leave him, and with it all chance of buying another, he would become the mere plaything of Fortune, sink lower and lower, until he reached the dregs of society. And Nell must needs share his degradation.

Simon perceived now, however, with the clearness which is so apt to come just too late, that his promise was an act of almost criminal generosity. He should have furnished Terence with a large sum of money rather than have consented to this insane, dishonorable silence. But Terence had wrought upon Simon by his fatal persuasive faculty, and used Nell as a lever for the upsetting of his judgment. There remained only for Simon to break his word—in other words, to cease to be himself—or to lie upon the bed prepared

by his own folly. "Terence will dun me for money at the end of the month, anyway," he concluded, with a hard laugh.

But one day's hiding of his head was enough for Simon. Pride and obstinacy alike demanded that there should be no skulking from the public view. He made up his mind to ride about as usual, look all men in the face, and dare them to accuse him. This course seemed not only an easy but a comforting one, as the most heroic line of conduct always seems, until tried.

To-morrow was market-day at Chillington, and everybody would be abroad. Here was just the opportunity his present mood craved for showing his high scorn of these false accusers. And perchance—this thought underpropped his harder ones—there would be found some few loyal enough to come forward and show that they believed in him still.

Next morning, his reckless, heroical mood still holding good, Simon proceeded to carry his promising plan into execution. Having breakfasted and received Mrs. Henley's morning report of Sir Hamo's health, he buckled on his proof-armor of pride, mounted his tall bay Philanthropy, and headed him northward. And probably no haughtier-looking gentleman had ever ridden along the ancient road to Chillington; for Simon's bitterness, finding its way to his face, seemed to have limned it anew with a harsh hand.

Upon reaching Chillington bridge he found himself among the accustomed group of loungers, and treated them one and all to a fierce glare. Ordinarily there would have been a general touching of hats, and one or two would have come forward with the morning's news. Not a finger was lifted on this occasion.

Naturally their principal topic to-day had been Mr. Secretan's disgrace, and the man who had handled it with keenest relish was now hanging over the bridge parapet with nervous unconcern. Another man jerked his thumb towards the horseman, cocked his hat rakishly, and grinned broadly at his friends. The bolder spirits grinned back, others shuffled awkwardly with their feet; not a word of greeting was offered, good or bad.

Already the man who had come here expressly to show how little he cared was suffering keenly; in fact, the sensitive, thin-skinned Simon had undertaken a task for which the possession of a bull's hide was the first essential. But if his nerves were quivering, his obstinacy was firm as a rock; he would rather die than turn back now.

He rode on into the High Street, where the very stones seemed

to cry shame upon him. It was crowded with familiar faces, and his disgrace was written upon every one. Each particular glance he met carried its own special pang. Men stopped to point him out to their neighbors; tradesmen came to shop-doors to gaze at the brazen wrong-doer. No man addressed him, but women talked of him to each other in quasi-audible tones. He heard the town's opinion of him at every stride of his horse. The very air seemed to scorch him. Those who hated Simon might well be jubilant this morning. But no one gave him the opening for which he was panting by the time he had got half-way up the street; nor would any man meet the challenge of his eyes. Twice up and down the High Street he rode at a foot's pace, until his heart was sobbing and a rushing sound was filling his ears. Then he dismounted, giving his horse to he knew not whom, and drifted through the archway into the market-place, too much stunned to know whither he was going; and here his distress was destined to reach a climax.

The market-place consisted of an inner covered portion, under which all the neighborhood's traffic—in poultry, eggs, fish, colored handkerchiefs, cheap millinery, and a score of other things—was concentrated once a week, and an outer open space, where were the permanent stalls of butchers and other tradesmen of the town. Up till noon on market-day the central part would always be packed close with a chaffering throng, which fringed away into thinner groups through four arched openings.

It so happened that the butter-and-cream stall, just within the archway through which Simon entered, was to-day in charge of the Mrs. Parminter whose flooded cottage we saw him disencumbering of furniture on the day of the great flood. This redoubtable woman had since then been living with a sister, whom, after an acrid silence of some years, she had found it convenient to propitiate. But it was a hard thing thus to eat humble-pie to a sister much better off than herself, and Mrs. Parminter had not forgotten to whom she owed the necessity. Against this gentleman, this future baronet, who, under pretence of charity, thrust people into hovels only built to catch the floods, she entertained a grudge such as only a professional shrew can hope to build up. And she now saw him approaching from under the archway, walking unsteadily, looking dazed and bewildered. No wonder the woman panted with triumph, while her hard-lined face was puckered with a malignant grin.

As Simon drifted vaguely past the stall, a sudden torrent of vituperation swept down upon him. The High Street had taunted him

mainly with quiet sneers tossed over shoulders, or had scowled at him in silence, the small boys alone venturing to follow him with cries of "Who killed Mary Pethick?" But now all the scorn and wrath of Chillington was pouring from Mrs. Parminter's tongue with the vehemence of a flooded mill-race. No mealy words made up the torrent, but the coarsest and crudest to be found in the store of a coarse woman, so that in that stream of foul abuse poor Mary's name was like a white blossom carried along by a sewer.

A crowd soon collected round Simon and his accuser, and other tongues were loosed.

Simon was no longer master of himself, hardly even conscious of what he was doing, until, right before him, emerging from the threatening crush, he perceived that for which his soul craved—a man as tall and powerful as himself menacing him with a heavy whip.

It was a young farmer named Fry, a former lover of Mary's, and the moment he was within reach he slashed Simon across the face with the whip.

When Simon struck him back, those who heard the heavy farmer fall thought he would never rise more. Then the women were thrust aside, and the men fell upon Mary's supposed seducer.

But there were many present who would not quietly allow one man to be mauled by a dozen; the brawl at once became general. In a twinkling the stall was smashed to fragments, the corner of the market was a hurtling mass of arms and fists and sticks, of heavy breathings and straining bodies. A short but savage brawl it was, where every blow went home with an oath, and those who fell were trampled by those who fought.

Simon the philanthropist strove and struck with the fury of a madman, so that no man could stand before him. After a time—whether long or short he never knew—he found himself standing ringed by a clear space. The fighting lust still burned in him; blood was flowing from more than one cut on his face; he was still shouting for an adversary, jeering at the throng for a pack of cowards. Some were advancing again, when a voice in his rear called out:

"Keep back, damn you all, or he'll be the death of some o' you! Here's Farmer Fry with some ribs broken, and one or two others pretty bad. You'd best look after the wounded and mend your own heads, while I get this madman away."

The speaker then plucked at Simon's arm, saying, persuasively:

"Come, sir, you've had fighting enough for one day. Damme, what 'll the neighborhood say of us, and me a poor devil with a practice to make?"

"Hands off!" cried Simon, angrily.

"Man, man, you'll ruin my reputation as a quiet young doctor. Come, don't be rough on a chap who has fought on your side and lost half his front teeth in the scrimmage! Suppose we stand easy a bit before we renew this pretty scene, anyway?"

Simon found himself being drawn quietly to the archway, still exhorted by the good-natured voice; and in two minutes Jack Syme —for he it was—had captured the first empty farmer's gig he could lay hands on, hustled his charge onto the seat, jumped up himself, and was driving rapidly across the open space beside the town-hall in the direction of the Monks Damerel road.

It happened by a neat twist of circumstance that the cart belonged to Farmer Fry, who had begun the broil, and now lay insensible amid the wreck of the stall. As he drove over the town bridge, and lashed the farmer's mare into a hand-gallop, Syme grinned at his own cleverness.

"But for this cart and my mother-wit the row would have ended in manslaughter, I reckon," he chuckled. "As 'tis there'll be a job or two for Dodson and the other doctors—and Terence 'll have to stand me a new set of teeth, by George! How d'ye feel, Mr. Secretan? I'm not a bit surprised at you; have seen something of your sort before now. No such fierce devil, when roused, as your big, fair-haired, soft-hearted cuss who wouldn't tread on a worm most times! But in your place I'd keep clear of the town for a month or two. You're the sort that gets drunk with fighting, and so it isn't good for you—or other people. There was a pal of mine at Bart's just of your stamp—a quiet chap enough in a general way, but a reckless firebrand at bottom. 'Struth, but you did maul some of 'em just now! 'Twas a pretty little row in its way, and I don't pretend not to have enjoyed it. We're all savages at heart, you see—a blow or two, and the veneer of civilization comes off in cakes!"

Jack Syme smacked his thick lips by way of conclusion, and snapped together his remaining teeth with more relish than might have been expected from so very quiet a young doctor.

As they drove along and Simon's heat evaporated, he grew full of lassitude and weariness; yet, even so, listened to the doctor's rollicking talk, and responded to his consolatory efforts in a way which im-

pressed Jack oddly. Syme began to be interested in this man whom he had hitherto hated with some cordiality.

"Secretan's an odd mixture," he reflected. "What the deuce can one make of a man who bears himself like an aristocrat, spends his days in scientific study or in fidgeting the poor, mixes philanthropy with libertinism, listens to what you have to say like a woman, and fights like a damned lunatic? Here's the queerest amalgam I ever came across—a Don Quixote or a Don Juan; hang me if I know which!"

Upon reaching the first lodge-gates of Monks Damerel, Jack offered to put his passenger down; but Simon entreated him to drive on to the Hall and have some lunch, adding, "You've got me out of a bad scrape, and I've hardly even thanked you yet."

"Pshaw! that's nothing; but, anyway, I'll drive you home and look to your wounds and bruises a bit. There's a cut on your cheek that needs sewing up, for one thing. Suppose we drive into the stable-yard, however, for Sir Hamo ought not to see you in this blood-stained condition?"

Accordingly Syme touched up the mare, turned into the avenue, and again betook himself to reflection.

He was the only person in Chillington whom Secretan had really injured; and this befriending of an enemy—a man whose uncalled for interference had done serious hurt to his prospects—gave Jack Syme one or two new sensations; stirring his magnanimity, yet calling for some self-contempt. Accustomed to carry through a quarrel to its bitter end, he was now showing a forgiveness worthy of the copy-books. "However, he's an aristocrat at bottom, and is sure to cut me dead in a day or two, when I shall be free to cuss him again at will." With this apology for his own good feeling, Jack satisfied his mind.

Half-way up the avenue they were stopped by a richly dressed and stately woman whom Syme suspected, yet could hardly believe, to be the house-keeper at the Hall. But it was no other than Mrs. Henley; and she approached the near side of the trap as soon as it drew up with a stiff courtesy to Mr. Secretan, saying:

"I beg your pardon, sir, but Sir Hamo directed me to give you this note before you entered the house, if possible."

With the tact of a well-trained servant, Mrs. Henley seemed to disregard Simon's strange and battered appearance; but her quick glance at him as he took the note was full of spiteful triumph, and her half-smile was feline.

While his companion walked aside a few paces the doctor fell to regarding this formidable woman. Her severe looks impressed him not a whit, but the superior fashion of her garments and her loftiness of mien called forth a train of philosophical reflection.

"She's a deal better off than I shall ever be," he mused; "and will have nice pickings when the old gentleman slips his cable. I might do worse than make her an offer of marriage? Yes, and I'd do it to-morrow, by Jove, though she's old enough to be my mother—only she'd never look at anything so low as a doctor. Fancy introducing such a duchess of a woman to our little villa at Hammersmith—lord, how she would sneer! Hullo! is she going to make advances to me?"

Mrs. Henley was, in point of fact, bent upon having some discourse with the doctor. She now came close to the cart, carefully holding back her silk dress from the muddy wheel, and whispered, eagerly:

"Is it true, sir—about the other night, I mean? Mr. Doidge has been closeted with Sir Hamo for ever so long, and I overheard—at least, they talked so loud that a sentence or two reached me—about Mr. Simon and the cricket meeting."

"Ezekiel up there!" Syme gave vent to a low whistle. "Then he only means to spoil Secretan's prospects? I should hardly have thought the crazy fellow would have been satisfied with so mild a course?"

"Is it true, Dr. Syme? Were you there yourself?"

"Yes, I was there. What did Sir Hamo say to the news?"

"He's cruel bad, sir. I had to send off for Dr. Clancy an hour ago, and he's with Sir Hamo still."

"Here's a scene in high life for the local papers," thought Syme. "Between the public and the parent our young squire is likely to get it hot, it seems?"

"If 'tis true," muttered Mrs. Henley between her shut lips, allowing her intense excitement to gleam in her eyes for a moment, "Sir Hamo 'll cut him off with a shillin', sure as I stand here; aye, and will understand why Miss Nell had to throw him over. Ah! I always thought there was some bad story behind that."

"You always *hoped* it, judging by your looks," thought Syme. "However, perhaps you're not far wrong. Likely enough, Miss Nell had suspicions, and Secretan the sinner made way for Clancy the comparative saint; in fact, vice was humbled, and virtue triumphant—as always happens in this best of worlds."

Instead of gratifying Mrs. Henley by expressing these sentiments aloud, however, Jack looked over his shoulder to see how the sinner was faring.

Simon was leaning against a tree with the letter crushed in his hand. He had turned very pale, and with his torn clothes and cut-open cheek, presented a rather ghastly appearance; but, finding himself observed curiously, he quickly straightened himself, and stalked to the trap haughtily enough.

"You can tell your master that he will hear from me shortly," he said to Mrs. Henley; and she bowed without daring to hazard a remark or ask a question, though half frantic with curiosity.

"I am sorry to say," Simon turned to the doctor, with a courteous bend of the head, "that I cannot offer you any hospitality at the Hall to-day; but I hope you'll come and lunch with me at the Falcon?"

"Damn it, the man has pluck!" muttered Syme. Aloud he said something confusedly about an engagement. He was conscious that this man with the pale face and quiet voice was mastering him as well as the house-keeper; there was a kind of proud despair about Simon that awed and touched him at once.

"I'm sorry you won't lunch with me; but in that case let us drive back into the village."

Jack Syme did everything he was told, like a school-boy under the master's orders; and when they drove off Mrs. Henley stood gazing after them.

"Has he gone altogether?" she asked herself. "Have we ousted his philanthropic lordship for good and all? If so, the Lord be praised!"

The pair proceeded at once to Monks Damerel hamlet and pulled up before the first cottage, where Secretan descended.

Almost before his foot touched the ground a wrinkled old woman came forth carrying a slate in her hand. This old body was known to Jack Syme as a deaf-mute, Sarah Venn by name, who looked after and cleaned Mr. Secretan's observatory.

Simon began at once to write upon her slate, reading the words aloud, as though willing to make Syme aware of his plan—"I wish you to come over to Hollacomb Farm as soon as possible; I am going to live there for a month, and shall be glad to have your services as house-keeper."

Mrs. Venn, after perusing the slate, nodded and smiled, well content to serve the open-handed young squire, and too old, or too indifferent, to feel any curiosity about his sudden freak.

"And now, Mr. Syme, I mustn't trespass upon your kindness any longer. You've been a friend in need to me to-day, and I only hope Farmer Fry won't proceed against you for stealing his trap."

"You're going to stay here?"

"I'm going to walk on to Hollacomb. You can leave me here."

"I'm hanged if I do!" cried the other, brusquely. "You ain't fit to do the walk. If you're bound for Hollacomb, so am I."

Secretan jumped up without more words, and they once more set off.

Jack Syme felt all abroad by this time, and drove along in puzzled silence. It was clear that a breach of some sort had occurred between Sir Hamo and his son, but that Simon should set up his tent at Hollacomb above all other places, the scene of his victim's death, filled him with astonishment. The farm was a lonely, deserted place, buried among lonely, dripping woodlands. Old Mr. Pethick had been removed by his friends on the day of the inquest; already it was rumored that the dead girl's spirit haunted the farm and path by the canal. What, in the name of wonder, could induce Secretan to bury himself in this grewsome spot with a deaf, speechless old crone for his sole companion?

Yet, for all his self-confidence, Jack Syme could not bring himself to ask any prying questions; for not only had Secretan's stoical bearing a suppressive power of its own, but his very courtesy magnified the same. Nor could the doctor, whose own experience inclined him to look upon poverty and physical suffering as the only serious ills of life, realize that this proud, healthy, well-to-do gentleman could be suffering any pangs calling for the pity of a poor devil like himself.

They passed slowly through a long, rutty lane, emerged onto the high-road for a mile or so, then commenced the steep ascent through the Hollacomb woods, reaching the farm about two o'clock.

This ancient farm-house of Simon's was built upon a small knoll, and so elevated somewhat above the canal banks. It had been in possession of his mother's family through many generations, having been, in all probability, designed as a residence for some younger son at a period when the junior members of a county family settled into some small house on the ancestral estate without much thought of carving out a career; or even, as in very many cases, set up as small tradesmen in the neighboring market-town.

Most of the land attached to the homestead had generations ago been absorbed into a neighboring large farm, and the remainder

planted with oak and birch trees; thus the little group of buildings had been gradually immersed in an advancing tide of woodland.

When the spring-cart with its two passengers emerged onto the narrow breadth of sward that lay between knoll and canal, Syme gazed at the dreary place with a kind of shudder, then glanced quickly at his companion as though expecting him to change his mind.

But Secretan descended without hesitation, and made his way to a big stone under which he knew the house-key to be concealed.

Key in hand, he then mounted the knoll by a little curving path which led up to the glazed door of the farm parlor. This door opened onto some steps cut in the rock, and was sheltered by two immense ash-trees with rugged pinkish-gray bark and great moss-cushioned limbs. Under the trees was a rustic seat erected by Simon's late tenant, Mr. Pethick, who would sit here dabbling with his science primers through half a summer day. Here, too, had Mary sat and dreamed away the time over some romance thick-sown with noble names, when no concert or other diversion drew her steps townward.

"Come up and see the place," Secretan called out, when he had unlocked the door. "Some of the old man's furniture is quaint and curious."

"No, thank you," grinned Syme, from below; adding, in a voice of some concern, "Surely you're not going to spend a whole month in this desolate hole?"

Secretan certainly looked out of keeping with his surroundings as he stood upon the rocky steps, with the sodden thatch dripping mournfully upon him, and on all sides ruined woodlands weeping for the dead and gone summer.

"May I ask if you intend remaining in the neighborhood when your hermit-month is up?" asked the doctor, when Simon emerged from a brief inspection of the homestead.

"At the end of a month I shall leave it, with the fixed intention of never seeing it again."

"I begin to understand," the other muttered under his breath. "Secretan's not mad, but bent upon doing a penance. He's bitten with remorse, and means to work it off by solitary confinement. Yes, that's how the case stands; I've hit it at last. And how much will that benefit the poor girl who has gone to kingdom-come, I wonder? What cussed odd corners there are in the man, to be sure! Now, how am I to part from him? Shall I offer to shake

hands? No; he'd think that infernal presumption. Besides, I've only half forgiven that old injury. Yet I'd shake hands like a shot if he cared to do it." Simon was now standing beside the trap, evidently expecting the other to depart. "Well, good-bye, Mr. Secretan."

"Good-bye, and many thanks."

"Don't mention it. Good-bye."

Syme gathered up his reins, paused, felt mean, and nearly dropped them again; then drove off without further demonstration, looking hot and uncomfortable.

CHAPTER XXIV

THERE was a cheerful commotion at the White House one morning some ten days after Simon's secession to his woodland hermitage, for Nell Clancy, being now pronounced convalescent, was to descend to the morning-room and throw aside the distasteful rôle of interesting invalid.

She had been very apologetic for permitting herself to be laid up at all, and stated her intention of exhibiting her old robust health from this day forth.

"I do so hate being a nuisance to everybody and turning your home into a hospital, Terence," she had been exclaiming several times a day; but her careful husband, well aware of her tendency to be over-energetic, had hitherto flatly declined to allow her downstairs.

Terence had made many little preparations for her comfort, bustling about upon one small errand after another with the ardor of a school-boy and the thoughtfulness of a woman; but, being called away into the town just as she was about to descend, he missed the pleasure of welcoming her back to the routine of happy every-day life.

About mid-day, however, he cantered up the hill again, and rushed in exultingly to greet his young wife.

But the brightness fell from him before he had taken two steps into the room. He found Nell lying back in an arm-chair, looking tearful and woe-begone.

Terence's first impulse was to turn back, jump on Rosalind's back, and gallop away from the house. He guessed at once what had happened, and knew that the inevitable climax, which he had yet hoped to put off a few days longer, could not now be avoided.

Strict injunctions had been laid upon the servants not to breathe a word to their mistress of the events with which the place was ringing; but doubtless during his absence this morning some pertinacious friend had thrust herself upon Nell and babbled for an hour of the cricket meeting, the brawl in the market-place, the retirement of Simon to the farm, and all the rest of it.

"Do stay, Terence dear," entreated Nell, seeing that her husband was inclined to edge away towards the door, "and let me know the truth about this dreadful business. Ah, I can see by your face that there is something seriously wrong."

Terence sat down, pale and perturbed, at some little distance from his wife.

"Who has been to see you?" he asked, in a voice that accorded well with his looks.

"Miss Doddridge, dear."

"I thought so. That woman is no better than a fool!"

"You're vexed with her for telling me all this wretched news; but I must have heard it sooner or later. Oh, Terence, is any of it true?"

"Is what true?"

"All this about Simon?"

"I can't answer vague questions like that. I do wish you would be a little more specific, Nell. Do you mean, was a public accusation made against him? Yes, that is true."

"No, no. What do I care about the mere fact of the accusation? I want to know upon what ground it was based, what vestige of excuse even his worst enemy could find for hinting such a thing about a man like Simon?"

"You always did have a mighty high opinion of that spotless hero!"

"Yes," Nell answered, simply; "and that's how it is I find it absolutely impossible to believe him guilty of any bad conduct whatsoever. Surely you have been to him, Terence, and heard his indignant denials, and have promised to stand by him? I can understand how he might have kept silence when Ezekiel Doidge fell upon him in public in that shameless way; for Simon is at bottom a proud and stubborn man—and—and—yes, I can half understand it, though I can't explain it. But surely you have seen him, dear?"

"I have seen him; but what passed between us was spoken in confidence."

"Then I will see him myself, and force the truth from him, and proclaim it abroad, and put a stop to these wicked, slanderous lies!"

"This excitement is very bad for you, Nell. I wish you would exercise some self-control, instead of throwing yourself into this hysterical state."

"So I am hysterical—if that's the word for being angry and bitterly disappointed. How can you be so calm and apathetic when

poor old Simon, the friend who has loaded you with benefits, is writhing under this public disgrace?"

"Confound his benefits and his virtues, too!" cried Terence, starting up with an ugly fold in his brow. "Isn't it enough to be loaded with obligation by a man I—I *hate*—without being dosed with his excellences by way of daily tonic?"

Nell, weakened by recent illness, wept quietly; but there was a growing stubbornness in her face which clearly meant no surrender. She had hitherto dealt tenderly with her husband's jealousy, abstaining whenever possible even from the mention of Simon's name; but she was for the moment stirred into downright antagonism by Terence's apparent inclination to range himself on the side of the accusers. Defend Simon she must, at all hazards. Her heart and mind were seething with indignant denial of his guilt.

Her husband, reading her face with a sidelong glance, fell into a silence which looked like mere sulkiness, but had a deeper significance than was apparent. He had proposed that this explanation, which sooner or later would have to be got through, should result only in vague generalities and hints that all would come right, rounded off in due course by sympathy and caresses. But, as usual, he had been over-sanguine, had relied too much upon the simple adoration, the sweet obedience of his dutiful little wife. Feeling himself little less than a demigod in her eyes, he had counted upon her meek acceptance of such soothing half-explanations as he could afford to give.

He now perceived that Nell had formed a resolution to know the why and wherefore of this matter, and that she possessed a fund of bitter obstinacy that must be reckoned with. Her angry championship of Simon brought back his old jealousy with a rush; and her failure in the adoring obedience he had looked for gave it added potency, at the same time filling him with alarm. This mood of hers was dangerous. He could not have her proclaiming Simon's innocence from the house-tops, thereby working up public opinion to a thorough investigation of, instead of quiet acquiescence in, his guilt. She was like one who stands whirling a firebrand over a hidden magazine of gunpowder, the sway of whose arm must be checked at all hazards. Her hands must be tied fast, and the only bonds available were—lies. The situation was too acute to permit of mere finessing on his part; its only possible cure lay in downright lying. Terence's brain buzzed with the hard thinking it was put to, but no compromise would shape itself to his efforts. His one chance seemed to

rest upon her absolute acceptance of Simon's guilt; to achieve which he must, if necessary, add lie to lie, false evidence to false evidence.

Nor would a temporary edifice of falsehood suffice now; the building must needs be such as would last his lifetime. By saying little, by merely allowing her to drift with public opinion, he had hoped to leave himself a loop-hole for final confession; but once he had deliberately, of his own free will, laid his guilt upon Simon's shoulders, he felt that no possible combination of circumstances could ever give him strength to own to such baseness; the terror of Nell's scorn would keep him lying on so long as the power of speech remained to him.

And Terence had not yet sunk so low as to be able to face this prospect without self-loathing. His conscience had been drilled into surprising obedience lately, but was not yet so wearied out as to be capable of sleeping through all noises. It was awake now, goading him insistently with Simon's past kindness and brotherly love, and most of all with his late self-sacrifice.

Her husband's face, always reflective to emotion, as pool to passing cloud, offered plain tokens of his present mental struggle, and touched Nell with swift contrition.

"I am sorry, oh, I am sorry!" she cried, drawing towards him. "It was harsh and untrue to call you apathetic. You feel it as much as I, dear; but I was always dreadfully hasty. All the same, Terence," she continued, firmly, with warm blood rising in her cheeks, "you *must* bear to hear that Simon's honor is very dear to me, that I always shall look upon him as a brother whom I have wronged deeply; who can never be more than a brother, but who, once for all, can never be less. Now tell me all that this wretched man Doidge said to him at the cricket meeting."

Then, with a seared heart, a desolating sense of having sunk lower than he had ever conceived possible, Terence entered upon his task.

He began by rehearsing the different points of Ezekiel's indictment. When he came to the story of the letter, Nell bowed her head and wept bitterly. With dry lips, in mechanical tones, he told of the clamor that thereupon ensued, to loud calls upon Simon to answer, yea or nay, the earnest appeals of Lord Bridistow and other friends; finally, of Simon's haughty refusal to say a word in his defence.

Nell listened, without raising her head, in stony silence. Her ideal Simon was turning to clay, and must soon fall to "cureless ruin."

"And I always thought him too good for me," she whispered presently, in a scared, hopeless sort of way. "He always seemed to stand upon a height quite above and beyond me."

"That's why I hate him still," said Terence, breathing heavily.

A new outrush of jealousy was bearing Terence along now, making this traitor's task easy of performance. "This loving wife of yours," the demon whispered in his ear, "was false to him once, and would be to you upon sufficient provocation. Were she to find out the truth she'd spurn you, and martyrize this matchless and faithful old lover. Trample on him now he's down; trample, you fool, or he'll rise up some day and blow your happiness to fragments! It has been the same story all through, from the first moment of your caring for Nell—either he must go down or you. It is a death fight between you and Simon, and you can't skulk off the field. Either pin him to the ground now he's down, or throw down your arms like a sentimental fool, and have done with it!"

"Do you remember that evening by the canal?"—he spoke now in a low malignant voice that sounded strangely to Nell—"and how Simon's conduct puzzled you? How he seemed to expect what he found?"

"Oh, don't, don't!" moaned Nell; "it is dreadful to have it built up step by step—let me hold fast to what little hope I have."

"I remember your precise words that night: 'He seemed to be looking for this.' That was what you said upon the spur of the moment, that was the impression you drew from the circumstances without a word from any one to bias you."

He went on steadily building up his case, spurred hard by fear and jealousy, until Nell could no longer hold her own against the cumulative evidence that he piled up. But if her reason was well-nigh convinced, her heart was still rebellious.

"You seem almost to take a pleasure in forcing me to condemn him, Terence."

He winced uneasily. For the moment the ardor of his malice was abated; for to keep it at the necessary high pitch he needed the full vigor of her opposition, which was now growing feeble. He was becoming aware that this victory would be no bloodless one; that as success grew more assured, the voice of his better self would once more insist upon a hearing, would scourge him the more fiercely when he had nothing left to fear. Already the sustainment of anger was giving way, the sickness of self-scorn was again creeping through him; the aftershine of old friendship was throwing into mournful relief the baseness of this old friend's betrayal.

Nell was weak and languid now, and much in need of her husband's consolation. One ideal was shattered; another seemed to be tottering. The man she respected most in the world had fallen lower than she could yet realize: the one she loved most had spoken so harshly as to fill her heart with pain.

"Terence," she asked, timidly, "has something come between us? Is it to be the old miserable story? Are we going to prove the justice of the world's miserable jeers about wedded love? You look so—so unlike yourself, and I'm so wretched, Terence—"

Here she fell from quiet weeping into violent grief, so that Terence was fain to call himself a brute as well as a traitor. Yet he was incapable of soothing or caressing her. He sat with his own head bent, feeling in his degradation that he was unfit to touch her.

"Kiss me, Terence!" she sobbed—"kiss me once and say that you still love me!"

But he could make no response, and burning tears were falling from his own eyes.

"If I had but told the truth at the beginning," he groaned to himself, "they wouldn't have been so very hard on me. In time I might have held up my head again as a doctor; and, after bearing my punishment, even *she* might have forgiven me.

"Nell," he said presently aloud, making a miserable effort to recover a fragment or two of self-respect, "you ought to keep yourself from being too hard on the man. Think how severely tried he must have been by your dismissal. In that state of raging disappointment a man is hardly responsible for his actions. When you turned upon me that night at Hollacomb Manor I was beside myself; . . . and—and I know what his state must have been a fortnight later, when he came upon you and me in the larch wood. Good heavens! is a man to be condemned so utterly for one false step—now, doubtless, repented of bitterly?"

"God forgive me if I'm hard," Nell answered, solemnly; "but I hope never to see his face again."

It will be seen that Simon was paying the penalty with her, as with the bulk of his judges, of his former spotless reputation. It is a commonplace truth—cynical on the surface, but perhaps honorable to human nature if probed deep enough—that the weight of a sinner's condemnation is always in direct proportion to the supposed excellence of his character. We can be lenient to our weaker brethren, but our heroes must be without stain. A Claudio may go astray

without drying up human charity, but an Angelo who slips is past praying for.

"You hope never to see him again?" repeated Terence, bitterly. "I suppose that is a sample of the mercy an erring mortal may look for from a good woman who visits districts and never slurs a duty? Nell, you're too good for a poor devil like me, who never hopes to be quite perfect!"

"Such pleading will not soften Simon's guilt much," she answered, sadly.

"But a moment ago you were crying out upon me for being hard on him, and now you cut me up for saying a single word in his favor. Lord preserve us from feminine consistency as well as feminine mercy!"

"Forgive me, Terence; I know I'm inconsistent—but I'm very miserable, too. You don't know what a blow this has been to me; . . . and I can't bear to hear you speak to me so bitterly." Then, with eyes full of tender submission and love, she whispered, laying a small hand on his neck, "You forgive me, dear? Oh, Terence, don't be hard with me! And let us quarrel no more now—and never, never again. Kiss me, beloved; your love is more dear to me than life!"

She stooped her head until her long lashes brushed his forehead; but Terence could only mutter in a choking voice:

"'Tis you that are hard. I cannot kiss you; you crush a sinner like me with your virtue. I'm not good enough for you, and can never hope to be!"

CHAPTER XXV

The moist warm mist of the Chilling vale had given way at the dry calm touch of genuine winter.

There was a thin coating of snow over the houses and streets of the town; the open fields wore a lace mantle of pure white, freckled with earthy brown, and mottled here and there with the richer hue of soil cast up by the moles. Ezekiel Doidge's group of farm buildings, which lay in the meadows below Hollacomb Great Wood, formed a ruddy oasis in the broad spread of whiteness. The woodlands, of a heavy purplish black, made another strong contrast; the osier beds by the canal showed golden-brown and pale amber, and the still water gave back the fleece of mixed grays which formed the quiet sky above it. The smoke of the farmstead went up straight and evenly. Save the two men cutting and binding fagots at the edge of a plantation, not a soul was to be seen in all the breadth of meadow and copse. Rooks were cawing and circling in a quiet melancholy way above the hanging woods, while the croak of cock pheasants rose up to greet them. The distant moor was clear, but not shapely defined. There was a slight frost in the air, and everywhere a sense of pause and rest.

Along the canal path, a mile or more within the woodland, the hermit of Hollacomb was slowly strolling.

Simon's intention of cutting himself off from the human portion of the world had been carried out with some completeness; but his endeavors to create a world of his own out of books and work, to be independent of human kindness, fellowship, and the other ingredients of happiness presumably supplied to man by his neighbors, had not been so successful.

In that dismal retreat of his Simon had proposed to substitute brain-stuff for heart-stuff, to take to heart mathematical problems in place of human ones. There seemed no need for insane hatred of his fellows, such as befell Athenian Timon; he proposed rather to ignore their existence altogether. He had spent some years of his life in the endeavor to benefit the community of Chillington, and the place had opened its mouth to swallow down his disgrace with

a greedy readiness. He had occupied a twelvemonth in trying to win the love of his promised bride, and had succeeded in completely estranging her. He had lent a strong helping hand to a friend, whose gratitude had taken the form of simple robbery. Half a lifetime of patient affection had rendered him no more than tolerable in his father's eyes, and had issued at length in a breach which would probably never be healed. In each of these cases he seemed to have vitiated all chance of success simply by trying too hard; so the only rational procedure for the future seemed to be to try not at all.

Simon had come to this conclusion, he considered, by process of calm reason; a sequence of pure syllogisms had led up to his hermitage. He conceived himself to be a fully equipped philosopher, minded to follow Teufelsdröck's method of handling the fraction of life; to make no demand of it whatever; to reduce the denomination of the fraction to zero, and so achieve an infinity of calm satisfaction. But, it need hardly be added, this recluse of Hollacomb was nothing but an unlucky man, with crushed hopes and a sick heart, who had stuck fast in the centre of indifference. He was, to borrow the words of a real philosopher, "one of such as take too high a strain at first, and are magnanimous more than the tract of years can uphold."

He had not, as many people imagined, been turned out of house and home by his father, for Sir Hamo had a superstitious objection to any such harsh, Roman-fatherly proceeding. Though he had never found much difficulty in bruising his son's heart, he could not bring himself to the point of turning his person out-of-doors. The note delivered by Mrs. Henley in the avenue had intimated Sir Hamo's acceptance of his son's guilt, as proved by his silence under public accusation, and had requested that Simon should in future confine himself to the west wing of the Hall, and spare his father the pain of further communication with him. To this Simon had rejoined by a brief business-like epistle—written as it were with chilled steel, though the penman's heart was burning—to state that he would never again present himself at the Hall save at his father's own request.

This final alienation was among the first-fruits of Simon's quixotic compact with Terence Clancy, and a plentiful crop was yet to follow. He had not yet realized the impossibility of fencing in the effects of a given line of conduct; and had yet to learn that a man cannot lift a finger without affecting the whole complex net-work of

relations by which he is bound to others, that the current of will which starts a given action cannot be conducted in a given direction by a patent insulated wire.

But these facts of ordinary experience were beginning to impress themselves upon him during this afternoon's saunter, thereby adding another degree or two to his normal mental gloom.

Water-voles and small birds, growing daily tamer now that winter had really set in, were the only companions of his walk; and the placid hush of nature seemed only to aggravate the morbid nervous condition in which three weeks of solitary brooding had landed him. Existence hung upon Simon like a heavy saturated garment, and no amount of philosophizing helped in any way to reduce its weight. In short, he was utterly weary of himself this afternoon, of his own hopeless disappointments and cynical heart-burnings; yet dreaded returning to his solitary room, and the labor that had lost its power to physic pain.

As the time drew on, however, be began to feel that any change must be for the better, that even the four walls of a room would have a less stifling effect upon his spirits than the solemn woods and cold gliding water.

Accordingly he turned his steps homeward, and began to walk more briskly.

Upon reaching the path of sward, now snow covered, below the farm, Simon caught the glint of his own fire through the glazed door of the parlor. But this failed to cheer him, causing rather a mental reaction in favor of the snowy landscape outside; for he had done too much solitary thought-grinding by that log fire to find much welcome in its gleam.

He toiled slowly up the knoll and opened the glazed door.

The little room might have looked snug enough with a buxom farmer's wife sewing by the fire, and a group of children scrambling; but the firelight displayed only the old bookcase in which still stood Mr. Pethick's row of science primers, and the table strewn with Simon's now hateful work. He entered in a spiritless way, pausing on the threshold as though but half inclined to face it.

But, upon drawing near the fire, Simon's glance fell upon a figure seated in a shadow near the door which led through into the kitchen; whereupon he started in a way significant of his nervous condition.

A sudden shoot of flame from the wide grateless hearth showed the figure to be that of Kate Tredethlyn. She rose and stood before him, gravely silent.

Nor was Simon at first capable of uttering a word. The appearance of this visitor vexed and surprised him, for he had given strict orders to his house-keeper to admit no one, gentle or simple.

After regarding him for a few moments somewhat nervously, though with a gleam of sympathetic amusement in her eyes, Kate ventured to break the silence.

"I have come to see you, Simon," she said, in a voice which came with difficulty, "and in the first place I must exonerate your housekeeper from the charge of harboring me. She wrote your wishes down on a slate, and then only stopped short of pushing me out at your door."

Simon placed a chair for his visitor mechanically and leaned against the table, grasping it with one hand, and staring at her confusedly. Kate's presence contrasted as abruptly with the narrow mental routine into which he had fallen as her graceful figure, richly befurred and mantled, with the homely little chamber.

For the first few moments she preserved a tense, alert attitude, as of one who anticipates a combat, and means fighting; but by this bold venture into his citadel she had captured Simon's works at a stroke. It was evident that he was in a dazed condition, and without a thought of driving her out again.

She relaxed her vigilance accordingly, loosed the fur boa round her neck, stretched her snowy boots towards the glowing logs, and said, in a natural, commonplace way:

"I'm tired with the walk, Simon. Could you let me have a cup of tea?"

The simple question made a curious anticlimax to Simon's expectations. He had looked for an outburst of some sort, for some speech or appeal pitched in a dramatic key, and this homely request brought his feet to the ground with a beneficial jar. Then Kate smiled at him, and the ice was broken for the present.

He walked through to the kitchen, and Mrs. Venn, who had, perhaps, been enough with young ladies to foresee this inevitable request of Kate's, returned with him almost immediately, bearing a tray with a black teapot, some massive slices of bread-and-butter, and thick whity-brown teacups, such as matched the homely character of the little parlor.

Kate at once turned round to the table and began to pour out the tea with a matter-of-course air, which rather astonished her host, now that his faculties were completely awakened.

"You like two lumps, Simon, I know. Have you got any marmalade in this Castle Dismal of yours?"

Mrs. Venn, watching the lady's lips, needed no interpretation by slate, and quickly fetched and opened a pot of marmalade, placed on a big plate patterned with staring blue. She was pleased, in a mild, unemotional sort of fashion, at seeing her master entertain a guest, but her feelings had, for a quarter of a century, ceased to be of a vivid order. Simon had chosen her as a person as nearly approaching to the wooden as flesh and blood could be found. The poor old woman had, indeed, reached the stage when a settled wage and a decent fire made the sum of her demands; a lower denominator to the fraction of life even Simon could not hope to compass.

Kate observed the philosopher furtively as she drank her tea. The gloom had settled down upon him again, and he looked stubborn as well as sad.

"We haven't shaken hands yet, Simon," she remarked, when the silence seemed to have grown dense as a fog.

"No, I believe not."

This was an unpromising beginning, but Kate knew the man she had to deal with, and was resolved not to stir from the fireside until she had forced a little conversation from the hermit. She planted herself more firmly in her chair and essayed him again.

"I don't see what is to prevent our going through the ceremony, Simon, do you?"

Simon only stared at the fire more stubbornly than before.

"I don't see why I should be treated as an enemy, for"—she paused a moment that her voice might be quite firm—"for I believe nothing of what they have said against you. I believe the accusation to be either a miserable blunder, or part of some plotter's scheme to save himself."

He smiled faintly.

"You always were a rebel against public opinion, Kate."

"Well, put it down to sheer obstinacy, if you will, but let me have the credit of it—and shake hands."

"Very well—if it gives you any pleasure."

"It does," she said, giving him her hand; "it is a pleasure to shake hands with one whose transcendent obstinacy is like an ocean beside my poor puddle of self-will. Oh, Simon, Simon," she continued, suddenly throwing aside her mocking tone, "it makes me wretched to see you here! How long do you intend to keep up this miser-

able farce? Are you going to spoil your whole life by way of gratifying your insane pride?"

Then Simon, moved by her friendly warmth, began to let his numbed heart speak.

"It doesn't matter much what course I take, Kate, for, once awakened to the realities of life, one knows that nothing's worth troubling about."

"A sudden rush from one pole to the other is not an awakening," cried Kate. "But you always were in extremes, Simon; for all your brains, you never had mental balance, somehow. To you every man is a hero or a scoundrel, and the world a seventh heaven or a Gehenna, according to your mood. But go on — tell me more about yourself."

"My life's nothing but a weariness," he cried, with a sudden pouring forth of pent emotion, which carried Kate along like a tide. "I've wasted my life grubbing like a fool among weeds, and taking them for flowers. I tell you there are no such things as human love and brotherhood; they are nothing but abstractions, creations of the mind, wherewith human nature has been invested by man's fancy, as inanimate nature with joy, or sadness, or peace. Self-love and self-interest one may look for, and find with certainty; and I believe a journey through a million inhabited planets would yield nothing to the searcher. Listen now, Kate. Do you know that the element carbon, the chief constituent of vegetable life, the element invariably present in animal life, and of transcendent importance throughout our planet, is proved to be also a constituent of the comets? — in other words, to be present throughout the length, breadth, and height of the material universe? Well, I believe self-interest to have as universal a spread. You would find man, or whatever created thing corresponds to man, the same mean creature upon all the billions of planets plunged in the depths of space. You'd find self-interest the leading motive, the only real motive, that drives life along in the sun-systems placed as far beyond Sirius as Sirius is from our own. Self-love is a tolling bell, whose tones ring through the universe—the knell of human happiness throughout time and space."

"I don't believe it."—Kate stood up and gesticulated, driven out of all dignity by Simon's excitement—"I don't believe it. If other planets are inhabited, I believe they are full of beauty and happiness; that our weariness and pain and littleness are unknown to them; that all our better imaginings may there be glorious realities; that there man is not separated from his Maker, and the still better

state that awaits him, by the miserable web that shuts us in; that our planet is the only one where man is condemned to look through a dark glass for threescore years and ten!"

"Tush, tush!" cried Simon, hotly; "there's nothing on the other side of the glass but the freezing ether of space!"

"Well, I don't exactly know what space is, or haven't a notion what ether means," said Kate, with a sigh; "so it is useless to attempt arguing with a learned person like you. In fact, I'm a wretched bungler altogether, Simon, and this visit of mine seems likely to be a failure. I came here to try and cheer you, and how can I manage that when you do nothing but entangle me among planets and sun-systems, and things that I know nothing about?"

"I say again that, just as carbon—"

"I don't want to hear any more about carbon, and don't believe you understand anything about it. To begin with, you said it was an important element in animal as well as vegetable life. Now, whoever heard such nonsense as that? Do you mean to assert that I'm made of the same stuff as a cabbage?"

"You're a very human-hearted sort of vegetable, Kate, anyway," he laughed; "and don't distress yourself with the notion that your visit has been a failure; for, in truth, you've done me a deal of good, and I've been a churl not to let you see it. You're the only soul who has been near me, except old Squire Rush, who was driven off ignominiously by my she-dragon. Come, let us talk about something more cheerful. Tell me about yourself; I want to realize that my own *ego* does not comprise the whole universe. Has Julius Rush been down on short leave lately?"

In her softened mood Kate was not averse to dwelling a little upon her own troubles; and the twilight having now fallen outside, the dim firelight invited confidence.

"No, I have not seen Captain Rush since — since that dinner-party at Hollacomb. He was very distant and unfriendly then, Simon. I doubt if he will ever say a cordial word to me again."

"Your treatment of his father has cut him up, Kate. You couldn't have chosen a more certain way of killing friendship than that."

Kate looked unusually meek, as though conscious of guilt, and rather anxious to be lectured than not. She drew her chair a little nearer to Simon, and sighed gently. If he would but talk a little of Julius Rush, and give her some hope that this flouted admirer

of hers was not alienated forever, Kate felt that she would go away a good deal cheered.

But Simon, not in the least comprehending a woman's mood, had nothing more to say.

She sighed again, and he regretted his blunder in having mentioned Rush's name.

"Well, I dare say you didn't mean to hurt his feelings," he said, kindly, "and I won't bully you for not liking a man just because he is my friend. As I said before, let us talk of something cheerful."

Poor Kate, having ventured as far as maiden pride would let her, had to give up hope for the present; but she wished Simon had studied the human countenance a little more, and the face of the heavens a little less. She rose to go, and, turning from the fire, glanced towards the glazed door at the other end of the room. In doing so she started violently, uttering a suppressed cry of alarm.

"Why, Kate, what has come to you?"

"There was a man's head close to the glass; he was staring in at us. Keep back, Simon—keep in the shade of the bookcase."

She pressed him back with both hands, breathing short and trembling nervously. By the time Simon had got free and hurried to the door, the man, whoever he might be, had vanished in the evening gloom.

"I'm glad of it—I'm glad of it!" she cried, rather hysterically for her; "he might have attacked you."

Simon laughed cheerfully, and began to search for her fur boa.

"Some one passing down the canal path saw the firelight and had a fit of curiosity—that's all about it, Kate."

"Do you think so?" she asked, doubtfully. "I do wish you would quit this lonely place. I know you have enemies, and—"

"Rubbish! my dear Kate. Come, let us start, for I'm going to see you most of the way home."

CHAPTER XXVI

The face of which Kate had caught a glimpse through the glazed door belonged to no casual passer-by, but to a man who had been prowling about the farm and neighboring woods night after night ever since Secretan's arrival—one who was, in truth, far more an object of pity than the lonely philosopher whose steps he was dogging.

Simon, the pursued, would probably regain his mental balance and resume the routine of a rational person sooner or later; but Ezekiel Doidge, the pursuer, was in far more hopeless case. The man's previous history, his bodily temperament, and the dead-weight of circumstances, were all combined in the work of hardening and stamping in the craze which now possessed him. He had domineered so long over those about him, had established such a reputation of superiority to the weaknesses of his neighbors, that, now trouble was come, human sympathy stood aloof from him; no one dared to do him the kindness of forcing his confidence.

And the only person into whose ear he felt minded to pour the "perilous stuff" that filled his heart was his sympathetic doctor, Terence Clancy, who, instead of giving him an opening for that salutary process, always contrived to hand over this patient to his assistant.

Growing bodily weakness, too, was lessening his power of resistance to the surges of morbid thought. He would do no work worthy of the name; he was too restless and irritable even to superintend the work of others; and so poor Ezekiel's heart grew blacker as his vital force waned.

The tragic death of his sweetheart had gone far to craze the man; days and nights of miserable brooding had since then so stirred the gloomy depths of his nature that wholesome thinking was becoming impossible. His mind was always working round a weary circle of which Mary's shameful end was the centre. He conceived that his own harassing jealousy had first pressed her into the crooked path, that his want of vigilance had made her continuance in it possible; and now it seemed that his plain duty, the only purpose for which

he ought to live, was to revenge her death. There was none else, her father being old and infirm, to see to the punishment of the man who had ruined her.

At first Ezekiel had been satisfied with the disgrace into which his efforts had plunged Simon; but very soon the gnawing began afresh. The retirement to the farm was a mere passing whim, he considered; the result, no doubt, of a quarrel with his father. But that would be made up in due course, and then Secretan would come forth to resume his old position, the passing disgrace being slipped off like a worn-out garment.

But poor shattered Ezekiel was not cut out of the stuff Nature uses for the making of assassins, so that he could in no wise bring his mind—except in theory—to the cutting-off of his enemy in cold blood.

The very facilities offered by Secretan's lonely ramblings in the woods helped to make such a task an impossibility. He seemed to have none of the characteristic fears of a guilty conscience; nay more, his apparent blindness to his own danger induced in Doidge a hesitation amounting almost to doubt of his guilt.

There was no difficulty whatever in dogging Secretan about the woodland paths at dusk; and more than once Doidge had looked in upon him lighted by lamp or firelight, as he had done this evening. Yet his gun had remained unloaded; the would-be avenger had never once so much as taken a cartridge from his pocket. He would scorn himself, and curse his own cowardice when he got home of a night, worn out with excitement and fatigue; and then would start off on the morrow, to follow, and track, and slink about, knowing full well that he would once more return with nothing done.

Thus, at the end of three weeks, Doidge was more than half beside himself with the recurring nightly strain; but had settled in his mind that only in one of two cases could he bring himself to draw trigger upon his enemy. Either he must come upon Secretan at the very spot where Mary's body was found, and find plain proofs of his guilt in the man's face; or he must take the train to Lymport and force the truth out of Joyce Melladew, probably the only living person in whom Mary had confided. Until every vestige of doubt should be cleared away, brain and hand would continue to refuse their appointed task.

The glimpse he caught of Miss Tredethlyn donning furs and wraps, and of Simon preparing to bear her company, sent him

reeling away, half dazed, into the darkness. For fear fathers a thought quite as often as a wish does, and Doidge's fear now begot the notion that this visit of Kate's was made to a repentant sinner, that she would never have continued such friendly relations with a hardened man who had confessed nothing. He conceived that she had come to soothe Secretan's remorse, that as they walked away together there would be some spoken admission of his unhappy condition; and then—then there would remain only for Doidge the fulfilment of what he considered a sacred duty.

For, weak and sore smitten as the man was, he would not then shirk the course which nights and days of hard thinking had laid down as the right one. He slunk after the pair down the dark lane between the leafless hedges, and out into the high-road.

Once or twice he got near enough to hear their words. Simon was talking astronomy, telling Kate of the wonders of the Saturnian system; he spoke of nothing but the stars in their courses, while his companion listened, only throwing in a word now and then.

The revulsion of feeling caused by this innocent talk came as a shock to Ezekiel. He was glad to halt and rest upon a heap of stones, and allow some of his despair to float away on the night wind. He could ask no greater relief than the discovery of Secretan's innocence, and such a consummation seemed now to be growing more probable. True, were it proved that he had hitherto been hunting a false trail, his next duty would be to start upon a fresh one; but there would be an interim of rest, and—this had come to be his true hope now—he might never discover the right man at all. The pursuit of his monomania had so broken Doidge that he longed only to have his task remitted altogether.

His principal desire now being to gain fresh confirmation of his hope, he decided to station himself at the head of the lane leading up to the farm, and there await Secretan's return. What course to pursue when Simon reappeared he could not yet decide, but he was full of a vague desire to have another good look at Simon's face when he thought himself unobserved, and of a vague hope of deriving some fresh consolation from being near him.

Accordingly the watcher retraced his steps almost cheerfully, and ensconced himself among some fern and bramble at the head of the short lane.

The long lean stalks of brake-fern were broken off short here and there, like stubble, but otherwhere were hung with tressy

masses of frond damply drooping, which, with brambles still showing a sprinkling of dun purple leaves, afforded adequate cover.

Doidge waited long, but the suspense was too mild to be wearisome. The drift of his thoughts became more cheerful as the time went by, for it took but a little thing to sway his mind now. He had deduced an added probability of Simon's guilt from the mere fact of Kate's presence at the farm, and now inferred his innocence from the mere ability to talk cheerfully upon his favorite topic. Logic had ceased to have weight with poor Doidge; he was no better than a straw blown hither and thither by successive gusts of nervous excitement.

By the time the moon had risen several degrees, and the thin web of clouds had grown thinner, he heard the creak and rumble of a farm-cart in the road below. It seemed to stop for a few seconds at the lower end of the lane; then, very soon, he heard footsteps.

His heart began to flutter again; the cold, which he had noticed but little hitherto, was now penetrating to the marrow of his bones. He peered through crannied thicknesses of bramble, and there was now light enough reflected from the white smoothness of the lane to define clearly the approaching figures. For Secretan was not alone. He carried a child upon his shoulder, and was stooping to catch the words of a woman who walked beside him. They moved at a snail's pace.

In one quick agitated glance the watcher recognized Joyce Melladew. The sight of her gave him a fresh stab of fear. Joyce must know the absolute truth as to Mary, and upon what other business could she possibly have come to see Simon? Doidge was already sliding back into despair. He thought that any moment now might be Secretan's last.

With shivering hand he put two cartridges into his gun—"One for him, and one for me," he muttered, in a crazed whisper.

Upon reaching the gate which shut off the lane from the grassy slope of the knoll, Simon seated the child upon the top bar, and Joyce took possession of her. Then he stepped back a pace or two, standing with his broad chest not four yards from Doidge's gun-muzzle.

"Still asleep?" he exclaimed; "why, nothing will wake the little creature now, Joyce. Last time I saw you she wouldn't go to sleep for love or money."

"She's very tired, sir. My little Rose-bud has done a great deal

to-day. I'm afeard you'll have to let us sleep on your sofa to-night, Mr. Simon, for I'm a trifle tired myself—and there's something I *must* say to you before I leave."

"Why, of course, we shall manage to put you up, Joyce."

"You'll be at the farm for a few days longer, anyway?"

"Yes, for another week; after that my plans are quite unsettled."

Joyce panted a little and leaned against the gate, supporting the child's weight on it.

"Your being here at all is a mystery to me at present, Mr. Simon; for of all the mad freaks that have ever come into your mind, this bearing of another man's sins is the most astounding. Why don't you tell the truth and blow this traitor to atoms? I will myself to-morrow, if you persist in this madness. I'll go into Chillington High Street and proclaim him. . . . "

Not a syllable more did Doidge hear, for at this point he fell back, fainting, among the dead leaves, and before he recovered they had passed on. Nor did he wish to hear more now; the truth was ready to his hand, his fingers could close over it at any moment —for this one night he could afford to allow himself rest and peace.

CHAPTER XXVII

In comparing himself with the gentler half of creation, man will sometimes set forth — in a condescending, judicial way, with due sense of his own magnanimity — the one or two minor points of woman's admitted superiority. After stripping her of justice, honesty, generosity, and other garments which he has appropriated for himself, he kindly leaves her with such flimsy underclothing as may be woven of sympathy, unselfishness, and a few other trifling woman's graces. But he seldom realizes how supreme a barrenness must needs ensue upon the loss of these mere femininities.

"How are you, old fellow?" he asks, by way of morning greeting; and before your first reply-syllable is formed, proceeds to a minute exposition of his own troubles, bodily and financial. For, judging you by himself, he shrewdly conceives that he must be first in the field in order to get a hearing at all.

It seldom strikes him that, if woman were to borrow his habit of selfishness, the wear of life would be wellnigh insupportable to all but the healthy and prosperous. For, though you may find scores who will accept harsh treatment from the world in general with tolerable fortitude, there are few indeed who can bear up against a friend's indifference to their troubles. The easy acquiescence in your misfortunes of those from whom you look for something better has a unique sting of its own; and the most resolute contemner of women will admit that it comes most often from members of his own sex.

Mrs. French-Chichester used to say, in cynical moments, "Blessed is he that expecteth little from male friends—most blessed is he that expecteth nothing. Men don't 'sit and hear each other groan,' as the poet says; the voice of their own groaning prevents that." And perhaps such an indictment is not without a grain or two of justification.

To consider, for instance, Secretan and his present companion.

He is himself a philanthropist, a man who has given years of study to the question of how to better his fellow's condition, but he does not now perceive that the woman at his side is sick unto death,

and can hardly support herself upright. He accepts with calmness her stoical explanation that she is "a bit tired." In such cases the kindest of men are blind as a gate-post.

Joyce, on the other hand, is, and always has been, a wilful woman. Through wilfulness she lost her home at the Hall, through wilfulness married Sergeant Melladew against the advice of all her friends; by wilfulness, in all probability, helped a middling bad man on the road to perdition. Yet she thinks more of Simon at this moment than of herself; hates to give him trouble; staggers along in pain and weariness rather than worry him with a single sigh or complaint.

Arrived at the steps, however, about half-way up the knoll, she was compelled to sit down and rest.

Simon carried the sleeping child in, laid her down before the fire, and returned, whistling softly.

"I wouldn't sit here long, Joyce; there's danger of your catching cold."

She smiled a wan smile, but said nothing.

"Come on, I'll help you up the steps if you're tired."

"I'm afraid—I sha'n't be able to move just yet."

Then the weakness of her voice struck him. He lifted her in his arms, bore her through the glazed door, and laid her upon a straight horsehair thing understood by Mr. Pethick, its late owner, to be a sofa.

Then, being freed from the necessity of further effort for the present, Joyce grew a little fretful.

"Mr. Simon?" she said, querulously.

"What is it, Joyce? Anything I can do for you? Are you hungry after your journey?"

"Yes, I am hungry. I want my Rose-bud."

"Eh? She's all right down there by the fire. I want you to rest, not to fidget with the baby."

"I can't rest; give me my little one—I *will have her.*"

Simon laughed, for Joyce's peremptory tone carried him back to old nursery days, when he, a giant boy of eight years old, had been ordered about by a little creature hardly up to his waist-belt.

"Give me my baby-girl," she repeated, with a weak tear or two on her cheek; whereupon he hastily fetched the sleeping child, laid her beside her mother, and wheeled the sofa round before the blazing logs.

Joyce clasped the little creature with a long sigh of pleasure, carefully removed the outer wraps, spread the little limbs over herself, and laid the child-head upon the mother-heart.

The philosopher watched the pair curiously. He had come to this hermitage in order to be quit of the human race; but was now perhaps learning more of the human heart than the practice of much philanthropy could have taught him.

"You look ill, Joyce, now I come to observe you closely?"

"Oh, I'm well again now. You must excuse my weakness; but she and I are to part so soon."

"Will your work oblige you to leave her? I should have thought the doctor would have prohibited any close application?"

Joyce smiled again, with something like the old gleam in her eye.

"He says I shall soon be out of his hands, Mr. Simon."

"Come, that's good hearing. You'll soon be all right again; and if you need rest while recovering I must see what can be done about your little girl."

"Would you—would you really?" said the mother, half raising herself; "would you— But I'm afraid to say it yet; no, no, I'll hang on to my hope a little longer. There's a kind of warmth spreading over me now, and I won't put the fire out just directly."

"I don't quite understand you, Joyce; but I think you should rest. Suppose I summon Mrs. Venn, and let her make you some broth or something, and then you might sleep?"

"No, thank you; I don't want her here. Mr. Simon, if you were going to have an operation, which might cure, but would far more likely kill, would you put it off, or make the plunge and get it over?"

There was a yearning in the woman's voice which touched Simon, though he could make no guess at its meaning.

"My dear Joyce, you mystify me. What can I do for you?"

"You can make my few remaining weeks a paradise, and let me die in peace, blessing you," she answered, in a strained heart-whisper.

"Tell me how."

"No—no; let me dream a little longer. I've given over the habit so long that 'tis like a childish treat come back. I won't tell you—I won't. If I do tell you, will you promise not to say 'No' to-night, so that my hope may dwindle gradually, instead o' bein' killed by a single word?"

"I will do anything in my power to give you a little ease, Joyce. Your suffering hurts me. What can I do for you?"

She clasped her child closer, and turned two burning eyes upon him.

"Sir, do you mind how you used to beat your elder brother, Hamo, in the nursery when you quarrelled, and how Sir Hamo would beat you afterwards?"

"Yes, poor old Hamo! I was always master—but we used to make it up afterwards."

"And how I used to rage and storm at Sir Hamo for touching of you? I always took your part, and we were always good comrades, weren't we? Well, I want you to take my part against Fate now. Listen, Mr. Simon, and bear in mind your promise to give me to-night free—or I can say nothing. The doctor says I'm quite shattered; he gives me five or six weeks more o' life, at the outside. This journey to-day will probably knock off three — say I have about two weeks left. Two days would suffice — two hours, if I could but get you on my side!"

Joyce paused for breath. Her intense earnestness oppressed her listener like a physical pain.

"But I don't wish," she resumed, with anxious haste, "to stir up your feelin's about *myself*. I've been afeard of death just like other people; but fear gets stale and worn out in time, and mine's pretty well threadbare by now. I could die without making much fuss; but for— Oh, you can guess! Surely even a man can guess!"

"You dread parting from your little one, Joyce?"

"Ah, 'tisn't the parting merely; there's something a thousand times worse than that! 'Tis the leavin' her alone — motherless, friendless, alone — in a world that I've found bad enough! My blossom! my blossom!"

"In whose charge do you intend to leave her, Joyce?"

"I don't know; I don't know," she repeated, patting the child with her quivering hands. "My husband's relations are offended with me; they will have none of my child. I have no relations left of my own but that leathern-hearted house-keeper of yours at the Hall. She has offered to take my Rose. Mrs. Henley will not let her hunger—except for love; will see that she's well fed and clothed—and miserable. The little one will be brought up to hate my memory. When she grows big her mother will be held up to her as a warning, and happiness will be kept from her like a poison!"

"I begin to understand—"

"Don't understand yet, sir. I'm not half prepared. I will talk to you for an hour before I let you understand." There was silence for a few minutes. Her next whisper seemed to pierce the silence

like sharp steel. "Oh, *do* you understand already? Have I spoilt my chance through over-haste? Mr. Simon, I entreat you not to let *her* suffer for my clumsiness."

"Joyce," he said, in a troubled voice, "who am I to undertake the guardianship of a little child? A man disgraced and imbittered, and—"

"A man," she cried with fierce haste, as though trying to clutch him with eyes and voice, "whom I would choose out of all the world, one who has justice and duty written on his heart. A woman might neglect her, unless she really loved my Rose; but you, even though you hated her, would but do your duty by her the more strictly. I don't ask you to raise her. Bring her up to the humblest station, so that you be but responsible for her. I know she must be something of a burden to you; but I'm a selfish woman in sore need. And, sir, you're one marked out to bear other people's burdens. You would have her on your mind; would see that she had love and care as well as daily bread. And, sir, she's such a lovin' little thing! But now I'm gettin' weak, and can't say out a thousandth part of what was in my mind. Would you turn me over a little, so as I mayn't see you, Mr. Simon? It will be such a torture to watch your face, for I know you can't decide in a moment."

"I will go out into the air for a short time, Joyce, and consider whether I should really be doing you a service by undertaking this trust."

Simon opened the glazed door hastily and was gone. There was no sound in the room but that of the child's regular breathing, and a faint occasional crackle from the hearth.

When Simon re-entered, the sick woman could hardly draw breath. She lay shaking, with closed eyes and set teeth.

He had taken but a step into the room when his voice came to her like a voice from heaven, and his words fell warm upon her frozen heart.

"Joyce, I will take your little one."

She clasped his hand when he drew near, and kissed it, and placed it on her baby's head.

"May the God I've been so bitter against these many years bless you!" she whispered. "And mayhap even a rebel's blessing may go for something, sir, when it comes from a bursting heart!"

In this manner it came about that Joyce passed from suspense into mental ease and happiness.

It has been said that the mere cessation of severe bodily pain constitutes great happiness; but perhaps a deeper beatitude attends upon the relief from gnawing suspense of mind. In such a case it is impossible to do full justice to the welling blessedness of the moment. One is tempted to look back and be a little wretched again, so as to revel the deeper in heart-easing relief.

Simon seemed not merely to have given the sick woman a fresh lease of life, but to have shed upon her an aftershine of her merry, mischievous youth. She was anxious now for the child to awake in order to show her off to the new guardian; and even in this minor matter her wish was quickly gratified.

The child began to move and stretch, to fumble vaguely with her hands, to stuff both fists into her eyes, and finally to sit up, wide awake.

Simon began for the first time in his life to examine with special interest a little child. Miss Rose also scrutinized him, though with a frank unconcern that rather astonished him. Upon venturing to approach her, however, he was driven away with contumely.

"Go 'way, go 'way—naughty!" cried the little creature with the confidence of a grown person rebuking a beggar. Then she looked at her mother with a chuckle of triumph, and both began to laugh at him openly.

"You mustn't be too easily snubbed, sir," Joyce remarked, wiping the tears from her cheeks; "for she's just such an impudent little hussy as her mother was before her."

"Perhaps she's hungry?" suggested Simon, as though struck with a bright idea. "I don't know exactly what children eat; but would some cold beef meet the case, do you think?"

"Oh yes—with plenty of pickles!" Joyce laughed again hysterically, then put up her hand with a deprecating gesture. "You must forgive me, sir; but I'm so happy that I'm forced to make game o' somebody. No, no, Mr. Simon, a child of twenty months isn't fed on beef and pickles; but happen your house-keeper would poach her an egg."

"Eggy!" shouted the child, with a wriggle of satisfaction; and Simon promptly went in search of Mrs. Venn.

When the egg arrived he expected to see it demolished in a twinkling; but he had not quite mastered the philosophy of babyhood yet. The child was too much attracted by the pattern of the plate to pay much heed to what was upon it.

"Oh, pitty, pitty!" she kept repeating, following the lines with a tiny forefinger.

"Shall I give your egg to Mr. Secretan, then?" asked Joyce.

"Sekkitan—then," echoed Rose; then slid down to the floor and began to caress her mother with a child's bewildering irrelevance. "Oh, poor, poor!" she said, stroking Joyce's cheek. "Not w-e-ll?"

This, being her longest sentence, was repeated many times in a quaint, drawling fashion. But at length she was cozened into taking some mouthfuls of bread dipped in the egg, first insisting upon offering each one to "Sekkitan—then," as she began from this moment to call Simon.

After this it was high time to play. She slid down to the floor again and began to paddle to and fro, carrying a stool about in an anxious manner, and finally depositing it on a chair and carefully covering it with her mother's shawl.

Joyce, seeing that Simon was becoming interested, and regarding the little creature as quite a new phenomenon, could allow her newly-won ease of mind to spread and deepen.

"You'll find a lot of human nature wrapped up in that small parcel, Mr. Simon," she said, presently. "Just put the other stool on the top of hers, now, and see how she'll take it."

Simon did so. The second stool was at once thrown down with a squeak of anger from Miss Rose. Then, as she seemed bent upon collecting all the small movable things about the room, he offered to help, and got dismissed with cries of "'Way, 'way!" for his pains.

Presently she halted before the glass door of the bookcase, pointing and saying, "Pitty bookee!"

Not having the key about him, Simon offered her other books, only to be rebuffed once more.

The mother regarded the pair with eyes yearning and hopeful, and a smile of deep peace. The child, standing and pointing imperiously, looked very quaint and pretty. Her small face was upturned to the big gentleman, her bright eyes looked eagerly from under the tumbled fair curls, the short, crisp little features were alight with piquant impatience.

The new guardian was of course compelled to find the key, and next to take down one by one a whole row of Mr. Pethick's science primers. When the last one was down, she suddenly lost all her interest in books, and became athirst for fresh diversion.

Here was Simon's opportunity; and his instruction had proceeded so far that he was able to grasp it. Sitting on the floor, he invited the little one to climb upon his shoulder; and, seeing nothing new to be taken up or put down, she kindly consented.

Thereupon ensued a triumphal progress. He marched up and down the room with the child grasping his hair, and squeaking, babbling, and kicking to her heart's content. Her effervescing delight increased at every stride, and Simon felt the strange decynicizing charm of the child-nature working in him like an anodyne. It was a complete conquest for the time being, and one more note was thus added to the mother's content.

After this the frisky little creature was tired enough to be glad of a rest. She placed both stools by her mother's sofa, and laid a shawl across them with much careful adjustment; then sat down gingerly, and leaned against the reclining figure, muttering sleepily, "Poor—poor, n' well!"

Joyce, after caressing the small head, and whispering endearments into the tiny ear, asked Mr. Secretan to take a seat near her, explaining that she had much to talk about, but little voice to do it with.

Then she asked him for a full account of how he had come to take another man's disgrace upon his shoulders.

As Joyce knew the truth about Clancy, the promise of silence was of course void, and Simon was free to explain the circumstances that had led up to it and for how long the compact was to last.

"I see, I see," she muttered, when he had delivered himself thus far. "You've given me only a clipped version of the affair, Mr. Simon, as I know very well; but I perceive that the whole transaction was most like you both. It was like him to work upon you when he found himself in a hole, most like you to be cozened into a promise of such insane generosity. Your friend has wrecked you pretty thoroughly for the time being, Mr. Simon; and but for me, it's like enough you'd never float off again. There's no one but me to pick up the pieces, d'ye see?"

"How so, Joyce?"

"I'm the only livin' person as can swear to the truth about poor Mary and her lover. You'm out of court yourself, don't you see? Having acquiesced in a lie for the best part of a month, the truth wouldn't come from you with any sort o' weight; your word wouldn't overbear his in public estimation. That's plain enough, isn't it?"

"But you don't think—"

"I don't *think*, but I *know* that Mr. Terence Clancy 'll fight tooth and nail rather than confess anythin'. He meant to do so, mind you, when he made the promise. I don't say that he didn't mean what he said at the time; but does a weak man like that ever stick to a difficult promise unless he's drove to it? You made things too

easy for him, sir; you opened a gate in the hedge, and he plunged through pretty quick, and will find plenty of excuses for stayin' on the sunny side o't."

Simon sat silent and amazed at this view of the matter. The suggestion that Terence would break his word now, and turn round upon his rescuer, was too painful to be harbored.

But Joyce went quietly on as though speaking of certainties rather than probabilities.

"He will fight tooth and nail. The man who has let you bear this for a month would let you bear it all your life — or through a dozen lives, if you had 'em—rather than take it on his own shoulders. What's to hinder him—gratitude? I believe when you set him up in his profession his gratitude took the form of robbery of your lady-love. Ah, gratitude's a mighty tender plant! A child's breath will kill it. And if he shirked discovery before, how will he like it now? For, remember, now that he's once let you suffer for him, discovery would mean absolute ruin to him, with his wife, his friends, his patients, and every one else besides."

She saw that her listener writhed under her words, that the truth about Clancy was going into him like a sword. But knowing that there was no time to be lost, she was anxious to stir Simon to action.

"You had best send for a magistrate, or other competent person, to-morrow, Mr. Simon, an' I'll make oath, or affidavit, or whatever 'tis called, as to the truth o' this matter. I'd like to get it done to-morrow, for I'm growin' weaker. Fact is, you've taken a load off me, and I don't seem to care about more strugglin', and people in my state are apt to snuff out sudden-like as soon as the call for further effort ceases. Think a minute what your position would be without my evidence to back you. In a few days' time you'd be free to tell your story, and he'd deny every word of it on his oath. Then they'd say, 'Why did you tamper with the truth? why did you let the lie bide so long?'

"There'd be not a tittle of evidence agen' him but your bare word; not one in ten would believe you. Mayhap his wife might, knowing you so well, and gettin' to know him a bit by now, I should think; and like enough you'd spoil her life — hers for whose sake you've bore this. For I know that 'tis so, though you gave me all your motives but the true un. And, lookee, sir, a vain attempt to set up your innocence would break you worse than you're broke now. Mr. Simon — I tell you this plain an' straight an' solemn as if I was in

church—you must either begin the fight the moment you're free, and with my sworn evidence to back you, or else hold your peace forever!"

"Your supposition as to his treachery is horrible, horrible," muttered Simon. "I can't bring myself to accept it."

"Put yourself in his place, sir. You've never known what it is to have to think about daily bread; but think what professional ruin means to *him*. He may feel qualmish, but he'll fight like a wounded beast. And, upon my word, you've a'most drove him to it by givin' in to him so at the beginning. You must fetch in a parson or a magistrate to-morrow without fail. Why, sir, the more I think on't, the greater seems the crisis. What o' the Hall and the lands—your patrimony? There's no entail, is there?"

"No. But what has that to do with it?"

"Mr. Simon, I'm loath to make you bitter, but 'tis my firm belief that if you don't right yourself Sir Hamo 'll cut you out of Monks Damerel. A better father might do it; *he* would to a certainty. Think over it all to-night. I'm a bit tired now, and my voice is goin', so I must just tell you my plans, and then get some sleep. I've one thing to confess — that I *did* rather hope to be took bad here, thinkin' so to further my Blossom's chance with you. I ha'n't a ghost of a fear that you'll go back from your word, so I like to plump out the fraud, such as it was. As 'tis, I sha'n't stay here to bother you after to-morrow. I'm perfectly at ease now, and shall get myself carted over to the town, and hire a decent little room there to die in; an' I know you'll have my precious sent over to see me every day? But don't be pityin' me too much, sir, for nothin' can rob me of the peace of mind that you've given me. . . . And, sir, happen you'll be talkin' about me to her sometimes when I'm gone? Yes, yes; I know you'll do that."

"Poor—poor," murmured the baby, sleepily.

"Ah, she'm half asleep already, and won't give you no more trouble. Lay her along by me, sir, would you?"

Simon did so, and the twain slept.

He then drew his chair up to the fire and hung over it, moodily thinking. Joyce's candid speaking had produced in him a self-revelation which was now developing rapidly in the silence. For the first time since the occasion of his public arraignment he was getting a fair view of himself from the outside, and the process was one of painful disillusion.

In common with most of his father's household, he had always

liked Joyce for her good heart, and respected her bright wit, audacious honesty, and pluck when in trouble. Upon the workaday matters of ordinary life he rightly valued her opinion a good deal above his own; hence the light that she had been shedding, even more by her tone than her words, upon his own conduct, was causing him deep misgivings. It was clear that she considered his yielding to Terence's eloquence a piece of criminal folly. Moreover, her repeated use of the phrase, "tampering with the truth," gave him that sharpest of pangs which comes when self indorses the accusation of a friend. The words remained with him like the after-flavor of a nauseous drug. He *had* tampered with the truth—from a benevolent motive, no doubt—but tampering there had been. He had so manipulated the figure of Truth as to make it unrecognizable for a time, and then had railed at the world for passing it by unheeded. In effect he had passed an adverse verdict upon himself, and then turned savagely upon his neighbors for accepting it.

Then, again, as to Terence Clancy. His friend had always been a weak man—a "good-hearted weakling," was what Simon had often called him in his own mind, yet had failed to realize that a good heart is not a thing to be trusted through thick and thin. How could he have been so blindly fatuous as to expect poor, feeble, shifty, well-meaning Terence to keep so difficult a promise — confession from such a man under such circumstances! Who but a fool would have looked for such a consummation!

The more Simon reflected the more certain he grew that his only chance lay with this sick woman. Joyce could set him straight with the world, and her statement could be kept a secret until Clancy was fairly started in some distant place, whither the effects of past misconduct could not follow him. He now realized fully how much depended upon poor Joyce, that without her help he would never be able to right himself with his neighbors; and the possibility of having to live out his life with his name uncleared, now that he had viewed it from so near a standpoint, filled him with consternation. He felt now that his fit of spleen against human nature was partly unreal; that he, least of all men, could afford to do without human love and respect. And perhaps he compared his own semi-tragical woes with the long pain of this woman who complained so little. Observing her now as she slept, with both hands wrapped over her baby-girl's, he guessed rightly that overwork had done much towards hastening her end, that she had worn herself down in the silent stoical endeavor, probably unmarked and unpitied of any, to support

her child in comfort. Now that he was learning to observe, he could note the contrast between the threadbare clothing of the mother and the dainty attire of the baby; and the tale that hung thereby was a useful critical essay to a man whose thoughts had been concentrated upon himself for three entire weeks. Humility may be learned rather well from a woman sometimes.

After watching her for some minutes it struck him, ignorant though he was in all matters relating to sickness, that Joyce's breathing was very faint. He wished that he had not sent Mrs. Venn to bed, or that he had himself gone for a doctor ere now.

While Simon was cogitating, however, Miss Rose awoke, and quickly showed symptoms, as far as he could judge, of being hungry. Then he looked at his watch, and was amazed to discover that it was half-past six o'clock. Evidently he must have fallen asleep by the fire, and have slept for hours.

He set the child upon his knee and gave her some milk, after which she began to patter up and down and pull things about as before.

Simon followed her in her perambulations, endeavoring to keep her quiet and away from her mother. But every now and then she would break off, apparently when most interested, to stroke the sleeper's face, with her quaint babble of "Poor—poor, not w-e-ll!" then turn to Simon with a wrinkling of the short nose, and gray eyes full of laughter.

These diversions lasted until the light of the winter morning began to steal into the homestead, and to gleam on the new coating of rime which the night had given to the great ash-trees outside. Then Miss Rose, tired of her new companion, began to cry for her mother and to pull at her hands.

Wondering how the invalid contrived to sleep through this attack, Simon bent over her with some misgiving. But she looked so placid and peaceful, so exactly as she had done when last he bent over her, that it was some minutes before the truth dawned upon him.

"Poor—poor!" cried the baby, fretfully, climbing upon the stool and stretching out her arms. But the mother would nevermore answer to that appeal. "Poor—poor" was dead.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The trout in the Hollacomb canal had for many years been considered the most exclusive and aristocratic caste of the fish world in this neighborhood. Cut off from the vulgar struggles and competition of the main stream, they had for generations enjoyed that combination of repose and good living which makes for high-bred serenity. As a man worried by small cares and heart-shaking bills waxes lean and bitter, and becomes a person to be shunned of his fellow-man, so a trout in a moorland stream, ever hungry, ever compelled to snap up every scrap of food that passes for fear it should go to fatten his neighbor, becomes a reckless, pushing, vagabond sort of fish, devoid of self-respect, hateful to his fellow-trout. In this way it comes to pass that even a duffer may always pick up a troutlet or two in rapid broken water. These youngsters, indeed, so far from having the nice discrimination of well-fed fish, will swallow down, without the least regard for prudence or decency, the scrubbiest bottle-brush of a hackle ever twisted up by a country tackle-maker.

Now, in the quiet-curving canal, especially in the upper reaches where it stole through the vicarage garden and the lush meadows below it, there were always to be had good feeding, bright water, and high-class society. The trout — few and fat, with beautiful waistcoats of white and gold — could live on sound hygienic principles; with leisure for proper digestion and friendly discussion. They were a class set apart and strictly preserved by the Angling Association, for the canal made an excellent nursery for the more vehement Chilling. No upstart from the river was ever admitted into this desirable residential preserve; and even such a traveller of note as a salmon-peal—should he chance to find his way under the canal hatches — was treated with a distant politeness that was apt to send him back, crestfallen and ashamed, and cynically craving for the free-and-easy society of the main stream. There had once been some talk of making the canal free water, of abolishing this house of lords at a swoop; but Mr. Doidge, who owned the water-meadows, put his foot down at once, and wrote a scorching arti-

cle in his newspaper—and so the scandalous suggestion came to naught.

Under the little foot-bridge that connected the vicarage tennis-lawn with the other part of the garden there lived the reigning sovereign of these waters—a noble trout of full three pounds' weight, who could take down two or three of the Chilling sprats at a meal, almost without wag of tail.

This lordly fish happened to be talking with a friend one afternoon, and from their conversation it might be gathered that blossom-time had come round again, bringing enlivenment to man, beast, and fish.

"Look here," quoth his troutship in fish-language, "they're actually beginning their insane tennis antics again—heaps of 'em on the lawn, d'ye see?—and more coming. Faugh! 'tis enough to spoil a man's appetite."

"They won't spoil yours, however!" thought the friend. "But, my dear sir," she answered aloud, "we shall see all the dresses and bonnets, which will surely be a boon?"

"And lose the iron-blue dun; just coming on thick, and the juiciest thing of the season!" he muttered, bitterly. "But, as a female, you of course harp on the millinery!"

"And you on the feeding!" she retorted, with a pert quiver of her pectoral fins. "If you can't appreciate pretty frocks, why not go and spend the summer under the Hollacomb woods, Mr. Appetite?"

This sally, however, was destined to pass unrebuked, for the sheeny little iron-blues came suddenly down upon the water, whirling, flickering, dipping; and the big gourmand was at once lost in a gastric ecstasy that no insult could disturb.

While he lay under the bridge, sucking in the duns with an absorbing relish, half the youth and fashion of Chillington and its neighborhood passed over the big trout's head; for none could resist the first tennis-party of the season.

Mrs. French-Chichester was there, with a new protégé, lately promoted to her train, *vice* Terence Clancy deceased—at least, married and done for. This time the lessee of her favor was a British subaltern, home on sick leave—a man ungifted with Terence's modesty, and so unable to resist the debilitating effect of the great lady's petting; so that she had wellnigh rendered him unfit for human society, and in another week or two his attack of arrogance might, figuratively speaking, be expected to end fatally. But, happily, she

was going to drop him in a few days, when the fever might take a favorable turn.

With them was Miss Tredethlyn, looking, to be perfectly candid, not a whit less insolent than the subaltern himself; for the atmosphere of a Chillington gathering was apt to inflame her natural weaknesses. She always breathed the air of the town with difficulty, and some of the commoner sort of people, often to be found on the vicarage lawn, affected her nervous system painfully.

Honest Mrs. Nelson looked wistfully at Mrs. French-Chichester and Miss Tredethlyn when they arrived, as though to entreat them to be gentle with her humbler guests. But no gleam of pity was awakened; the kind little woman abased herself for nothing. However, long practice had doubtless taught her the impossibility of pleasing more than about five per cent. of her guests; and were she to leave the choosing of them to a select committee of her friends, why, hospitality would be a simple process. In such a case, her six children might chance to have the garden to themselves, with ices, cakes, and dainties enough to make every one of them ill for a week. As it was, she asked everybody she knew—and suffered martyrdom. And the hard part of it was that she was too poor to entertain at all. Public opinion compelled her to do, so then criticised her roundly for doing what she couldn't afford.

When Captain Rush came across those two ladies, with Mr. Pardington their subaltern in tow, his smile was grim and bitter. He drew his father's arm within his own as if to defy Miss Tredethlyn, and gave her a bow to match his smile.

The subaltern, catching sight of Rush, exclaimed to his companions:

"Why, that must be Rush, of the 20th Dragoon Guards, one of the best polo-players in the service. Had no idea he belonged to these outlandish parts; must go and have a chat with him, by Jove! Why, he rode one of my ponies in a crack polo match once, and I was doosid proud, let me tell you!"

Presently, on the lawn where tennis was beginning, Mr. Pardington had an opportunity of carrying out this threat. Rush was standing alone by some rhododendrons when the other lounged languidly across to him.

Mrs. French-Chichester, being now thoroughly tired of the youth, hoped to see him snubbed; and, reading Rush's face aright, expected it. She glanced at Kate, and they understood each other with-

out a word, at once making a détour round the rhododendrons, and so passing behind the two men.

The subaltern was commenting scorchingly upon the play, the people, the rustic toilets, the vicar's old coat and baggy trousers, and such things. Rush hardly looked at him at first, but when he had quite done, said, in a calm reflective way, as though remarking upon the points of a horse, "What a damned little snob you are, Pardington!"

Mrs. French-Chichester had to go farther behind the bushes to enjoy it. Soon afterwards Pardington joined the ladies, blushing beautifully.

"Well, have you had your chat with the distinguished captain?" asked the malicious widow. "Did he put you up to any 'tips,' as you call them?"

He only muttered something inaudible.

"Do you see that limp-looking old gentleman talking to the vicar?" she continued; "that's Captain Rush's father, now Squire of Bickington—once a Bond Street tailor."

"Aha!" cried Pardington, cheering up swiftly, "I always thought Rush was a nobody. Somehow I never could be intimate with that man!"

"I suppose this is another Captain Rush?" Kate asked, in a steel-tipped voice. "Not the one who rode your pony?"

"Oh, er—yes—he's the same man."

"Your views seem to have changed rather rapidly?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mrs. French-Chichester, charmed to see her protégé roasted. "When you grow to be a man, my dear boy, you won't be so ready either with your blame or praise."

"And if you wish to practise feminine spite, you should mix it with feminine wit," added Kate. "The one sounds so poor without the other."

"Come, cheer up—you boys do take a snubbing so badly! Didn't he ask after your mamma?" inquired the elder lady, kindly. "Dear me! men are so selfish; they forget these little things."

"Don't let us keep you, Mr. Pardington; you might like another chat with Captain Rush." Kate's eyes sparkled. It was clear that she had not nearly done with him yet. In fact, the punishment went on for some time, till at length Pardington extricated himself and retired, feeling like a whipped puppy.

"That's right," cried the widow, cheerfully, "we're rid of him at

last; I'm sick to death of that boy! Now, Kate, let us go and have a good look at the interesting natives—they're worth it."

But Kate was out of tune with herself, her companion, and things in general. "How well he summed up that Pardington boy!" she was reflecting. "Even so might he sum me up, propriety permitting. But he won't come near me; he has done with me altogether, and it serves me right. I did want to talk to him about Simon, and we always agree upon that topic. I could agree with him upon almost any topic now; but, heigho! we shall never get beyond the weather again as long as we live; and—and what a flat, dull, stupid affair this party is; how I wish I had never come!"

She looked round almost wistfully for the soldier, and saw him talking with Lord Bridistow, whose youngest brother was about to join Captain Rush's regiment.

Lord Bridistow was asking Rush, whose high reputation in the service he was well acquainted with, to advise and befriend the younger brother. The mild old Squire of Bickington was listening placidly the while, looking pleased and satisfied, yet not much puffed up by his lordship's almost eager civility to his son; for the highest honor shown to Julius could be no more than an incident in the general fitness of things. He had no desire to talk himself, liking better to bask in his son's conversation; yet was gratified to see Kate looking on from the other side of the tennis-court. And she perceived his complaisance, blushing inwardly. "He thinks his son will score a point in my estimation from being talked to by a lord," she muttered, "and doubtless he's right, quite right. How low an estimate of me, and how true! How easily even a simple old man can read me! Yet I'm not quite so bad as he thinks. Perhaps I'm like one of those American butterflies my father was reading about the other night, which, being good for food, mimic others that have a nauseous taste or smell; but they do it for protection, while I have no such excuse. Ah, how gladly would I throw off my protective coloring!"

Her reflections were here cut short by the talkative widow.

"Kate, my dear, there's a woman here whom you positively mustn't miss. She has disappeared for the moment; but I pine for her return, and will soon point her out. Don't ask me to describe her; just wait and enjoy her to the full when she appears."

A brisk four-game of tennis happened to be going on in front of them just now, and an ardent pair were running and striking between Kate and Captain Rush; yet she managed to watch him, and

to note that he never threw a single glance her way. He smiled at one or two of Lord Bridistow's boyish jokes, and when he smiled Rush's somewhat sullen face brightened in a way which was apt to startle new acquaintances.

As she took in the pleasant scene, with its crowd of happy young people bathed in May sunshine, and backed by golden laburnum and a creaming wealth of crimson and pink May, poor Kate waxed sentimental.

> "Beamy the world, yet a blank all the same,
> Framework which waits for a picture to frame."

That was the color of her thought, though she had not Browning's power of expressing it. The picture had not been wanting, had she not smudged its beginning like a naughty child; the May might have been in heart, instead of before her eyes, had she not checked its first growth. How proud—yes, *proud*, as she now confessed—would she have been to find herself pointed out by all these people as the affianced bride of a tailor's son. Ah, the laburnums would have gleamed then!

For a moment, for one moment, she caught his eye, and perceived how immediately the sullenness came back to his face. What a pity the weather was so fair! she hated this spread of monotonous brightness everywhere. There was no character in anything; the world wore a smile fatuous as that of a silly child.

These darksome reflections, however, were cut short by her companion's voice, which seemed thinner and more irritating than usual.

"Ah, *now* look, my dear; here's a farcical-comedy-in-petticoats, to be sure!"

A very large woman was sailing down between the courts—a woman whose coming stopped conversation to permit of hard staring; immense in point of height and breadth, still more in point of thickness, and dressed with bewildering splendor. Rather a handsome woman, too, though nature's efforts had been heavily handicapped with paint and powder.

"She was rubicund when I last saw her, but now her cheeks have what artists call a 'scumble' of white—hence the delicate purple bloom," commented Mrs. French-Chichester, staring through her glasses with the pleased air of one who introduces a veritable phenomenon. "I believe Mrs. Ludlow, the Lymport milliner, contemplated suicide after finishing that bonnet; at least, I found the poor woman in a low, hysterical state which alarmed me. She entreated

me with tears not to let this head-gear of Mrs. Saunderson's drive away my custom, but I reassured her and recommended a dose of sal volatile."

"Who *is* this Mrs. Saunderson?"

"The daughter of a famous house—a gin distillery at Lymport. I'm told a sister of hers married into serge the other day, and another into haberdashery; but she herself has been clever enough to secure a gentleman—Captain Saunderson, of the Royal Red Clayshire. He has had to sell out, of course. What married quarters in the kingdom could have held his wife? However, he's short-sighted almost to blindness, so he *may* not take to drink."

Conscious of the admiring gaze of a whole lawn full of people, Mrs. Saunderson now came floating down between the courts in full view of Kate and Mrs. French-Chichester. Upon reaching a point just opposite her critics, she halted and turned to a little man who must have been following in her wake, though hitherto hidden by her masses of drapery.

"Now, John dear," she said, "we must find my niece, Kate, and I'll introduce you to her. She'm here somewheres, I know, and what a fule I shall look if we don't find her!"

Mrs. French-Chichester, gurgling with suppressed laughter, whispered, with a neat imitation of the stranger's accent:

"Happen you'm the niece, my dear?"

Mrs. Saunderson's voice struck the listeners with amazement. They had naturally looked for sonorous tones to match so ample a personality, but the voice was low and sweet, and had a ring of human kindness that accorded well with her infantile smile, suggesting the presence of a simple, natural soul somewhere within that vast tract of millinery. The voice was that of a good-natured child, the intonation that of a kindly woman, the accent that of the back streets of Lymport.

Though the play was far from brilliant, people began to stroll up in twos and threes to watch the game on this particular court. Young Tom Nelson, the vicar's son, whose skill drew few lookers-on as a rule, began to wonder what had come to every one, to try and brace himself up to the level of this large audience; and the other three players did their best to back his gallant endeavors, until, flushed with so much flattering attention, they all four surpassed themselves.

Presently Mrs. Saunderson, after questioning one or two of those about her, resumed her triumphal progress. She marched down the

court, worked her way round the end, past Lord Bridistow and Captain Rush, and turning to the left once more, bore down with full swing and sweep of all her drapery towards Miss Tredethlyn and her companion. The little captain again followed in his wife's wake, looking somewhat limp and spiritless.

Mrs. French-Chichester, eying him furtively, whispered:

"He *will* take to drink, if trotted about like this. Has the woman no mercy?"

A moment later Mrs. Saunderson stopped before the pair, exclaiming, with her smile narrowed a hair-breadth by a touch of nervousness, "Kate, my dear niece, I've just come round to make your acquaintance!"

What had happened? Had the sky fallen, or the earth opened, or the sides of the universe cracked? Was she falling headlong through infinite space, or had some one stunned her by an accidental blow? Kate felt as though her consciousness were split open like a pod, and the shattered fragments flying round her. "Niece—niece—*this woman's niece?*"

The friendly smile was crumpled in a moment, the good-natured face was purpling under its bloom, the large woman was panting audibly.

"I—you—you don't seem to understand. I'm your Aunt Mary, I am. Ha'n't Mr. Tredethlyn, my brother-in-law, told you? Didn't he get my note this mornin'?"

Still Kate said nothing, but stood in a stupor of amazement. The would-be, or real, aunt paled again, and tears came to her eyes.

"I—I never thought," she whimpered, "as my own niece would treat me so, and me married to a gentleman! John, dear, will you kindly explain to the lady who I be, and then we'll go, and never see her face again?"

But John Saunderson was too angry or too wretched to make explanations; and the vicar had to step forward from the crowd, for gather round they would, mere propriety shrivelled for the nonce by intense curiosity.

Before Mr. Nelson could open his mouth, however, the poor woman turned to him sobbing:

"'Tis gospel truth, it is; but I've no wish to claim relationship if my own sister's child don't want me. Ah, if poor Minnie had lived she'd never have brought up a daughter to set her lip at me that way!"

There was a time when Kate's first thought would have been to

hurt and crush this woman who was covering her with ignominy, but severe mortification had brought with it some discipline. Julius Rush's resolute neglect had loosened her arrogance at the roots, and taught her the pleasing art of self-criticism. She could still carry an arrogant front, as we have seen, but beneath it a crumbling of old dogmas had been going on, and something like a creeping paralysis of her old self-confidence. Rush was in sight now, standing apart with Lord Bridistow instead of pressing in as others were doing, but she felt that he was listening eagerly, and wondering how she would come through the ordeal.

In truth, it was a miserable moment for Kate. Hardly any conceivable eddy of circumstance could have hurt her pride more than this public claim of aunthood by one whose outward woman was so crudely vulgar.

Yet she hardly doubted but that Mrs. Saunderson was speaking truth. A dozen corroborations of the painful fact were flitting through Kate's mind. Mr. Tredethlyn had always been reticent concerning his wife, insomuch that she had feared to press home any questions about her mother's birth and connections, fearing to hear of something derogatory, the while she proudly persuaded herself that there was nothing to fear. Yes; this degrading claim was but too probably a sound one.

The iron entered Kate's soul, but the gaze of many critics stirred her courage. No one could have felt worse; yet hardly any one, endowed with her special prejudices, could have behaved better. The pallor resulting from astonishment and horror gave way to a bright blush, and with a fine effort of will she spoke quite steadily.

"I was not aware that I had an aunt living other than my father's two sisters in London, but I do not for a moment doubt your word, Mrs. Saunderson. Your letter may have arrived by the mid-day post, but I have not been at home since the morning. I think you will pardon my great surprise under the circumstances, and—and, shall we shake hands?"

Now was the sharpest pang of all, for the kindly woman fell upon her with a gush of tears; embraced her effusively; poured upon her a flood of talk with its local accent strengthened and swollen by excitement; and, in short, could in nowise make enough of her.

Captain Saunderson, who felt much for Kate—and would have felt more had his own misery been less acute—now came to the rescue. Never before had Kate quite realized the blessedness of what seems under ordinary circumstances but a mere outward grace—good

breeding. Captain Saunderson, though quivering with discomfort, at once engaged her in easeful small-talk, and they were soon strolling away as though nothing had happened, the large aunt beaming beside them. There were tears of gratitude in Kate's proud eyes when she turned them upon the little captain.

The humble ex-tailor, Squire Rush, had listened to it all—horrified at his own ill-breeding, but too poignantly interested to tear himself away. He looked wistfully at Kate every time he passed her afterwards, and many times muttered to his son:

"She's a grand creature, Julius; she came out, I say, nobly. I don't often swear, but, *by George*, she's a grand young lady!"

Julius said nothing, but looked a year or two younger and five years less sardonic. He would have given much to be allowed to speak to Kate now, but this was not to be; she had to punish some one for what she was suffering, and at present he was the only available scape-goat. If he drew near to her she looked more bitterly haughty and unapproachable even than in old days; and while Mrs. Saunderson prattled on, like a pleased child permitted for the first time to handle some rare and delicate toy, she comforted herself by plaiting together a few sentences by way of whip-lash for her father. For, though she was behaving so well in public, she meant to let flesh and blood have their say in her father's study presently.

There were some tolerably caustic things said about Kate as she walked to and fro with her new relatives; and the criticisms reached her nervous system, though not her ears. Tennis began again, and every face she met looked decently incurious now; but she knew that every eye was on her, that tongues of flame were licking her name. Briefly, Kate was under fire, and displaying not a little valor; with no prospect, as far as she knew, of medal, or reward, or even honorable mention. But she thought it due to her pride to remain on the field and take her punishment without flinching. Nor was the pain of her humiliation lessened by the instinctive perception that it gave such general satisfaction as that of no one else would have done; for was there a soul present whom she had not rebuffed or insulted at one time or another? Her friend Mrs. French-Chichester was unkind enough to commiserate poor dear Kate openly by glance and shrug; and went so far as to take back young Pardington into favor on purpose to talk the thing over. Assuredly the popular widow was not to be surpassed in the useful art of extracting pleasure from a friend's misfortunes.

Mrs. Saunderson's artless babble never ceased, and Kate was speedily in a position to comprehend her father's mysterious silence.

Mr. Tredethlyn had, to summarize a long story, married the daughter of a wealthy gin-distiller of Lymport, thus making possible his retirement from arduous parish work to the pleasant haven of Moor Gates. His bride had been anxious to cast off the fetters of trade and become a lady outright, and he had been quite willing to further so laudable an ambition. Thus an understanding was arrived at by which she paid stealthy visits to her people now and then, but was left unmolested by them in full enjoyment of her new status. For their part they kept to the bargain faithfully, and Mr. Tredethlyn had seen little or nothing of them since his wife's death.

But honest Mary Saunderson, having so gallantly captured an officer and a gentleman—thus becoming as good a lady even as her sister had been—thought it high time to lay claim to the two handsome nieces whose fame had long since reached her; and an invitation to a Chillington garden-party seemed to offer a delightful opportunity of achieving this end. Accordingly she had written yesterday, frankly stating her views, and thus giving the Tredethlyn party the chance of avoiding the meeting if they chose.

It will be seen that her innocent scheme had been all fair and above-board. With a beating heart, but a perfectly clear conscience, she had come over by train from Lymport prepared to embrace her nieces with effusion if they appeared, to try and forget their existence should they hold aloof from the party. Could they once make up their minds to meet her face to face, she felt that, grandly dressed as she was, arch and fascinating as she could be, supported as she would be by so unimpeachable a husband, she must needs take even the proud Miss Kate by storm — and this was just what she had done.

The Saundersons were among the last people to leave the vicarage, and Kate stuck to them to the bitter end. They were to return by a particular train, and so were unable to accept an invitation she gave them to accompany her home; but some day the new aunt, whose kind heart was drawing Kate even in her humiliation, hoped and trusted that she would be free to come and pay Moor Gates a real visit. This must be deferred for a time, however, for the bride and bridegroom were returning to town to-morrow, and in a few days were starting for the Pyrenees. Dear John, as his attentive wife explained, was so far from strong that his doctor wished him to spend at least a year or two in a cheerful sunny climate.

"Dear John" winced uneasily while his bride was descanting upon his feeble health. The man was as strong as a horse, and knew that Kate was aware of it. Yet it was not mere shame that was driving him abroad, the truth being that he was in a peculiar position. He had sold himself for money and was being rewarded beyond his deserts, and far beyond his expectations. It was embarrassing, but true, that his wife insisted upon bringing him affection over and above the longed-for cash; which made him a mean fellow in his own eyes. For he was just sufficiently superior to the average man to kick against a bargain by which he took all and gave nothing; and his present intention was to take this affectionate bride abroad, especially to such places as lay outside the track of his fellow-countrymen; to get used to her; to make much of her—if possible, to get fond of her. A good deal of this Kate gathered from his manner as she drove the new relations to the station, and what she learned of the couple this one afternoon gave her much food for reflection afterwards.

When that bewildering thing, Aunt Mary's parting embrace, was quite completed, and they had stepped into the train, Kate gathered up her reins and drove off in an oddly mixed frame of mind; but above the tangle of feeling produced by the almost tragical episode of the vicarage lawn, there stood up stiff and straight the desire for vengeance upon her father. It comforted her soreness to think of the coming scene in that offending parent's study. The black-browns were driven up the hill at a pace which astonished them.

Robbed, as she felt, of legitimate grievance against her aunt, the craving to punish her father increased with every yard she traversed. It was his weak, hypocritical silence that had brought upon her such humiliation as would make her quiver for many a long day: it would be a solace—some slight solace—to make him suffer with her. When she had spoken her mind the balm of self-respect might, perhaps, be restored to her.

The black-browns smoked along the road, whirled round the short drive from lodge gate to front door, and Kate sprang out. The boy who took the ponies shivered when he caught Miss Tredethlyn's eye.

In a trice she was in the study. It was empty.

Her fierce peal of the bell was answered immediately; her hopes dashed to the ground the moment afterwards.

"Master got a letter by the mid-day post while you was lunchin' at 'Ollacomb, miss, and soon afterwards ordered his things to be packed. He says you're not to be anxious; but he feels a bit poorly,

and has gone off to the Royal Hotel at Lymport to get a breath of sea-air for a day or two; and will you please to send after him his—"

"That will do—you may go."

Left alone, poor Kate could bear up no longer. She sank into her father's deep smoking-chair and poured forth her pent-up vexation in a flood of tears.

CHAPTER XXIX

"HARDLY ever, dear lad, do I venture to set up my opinion against yours. Come, now, am I a bitterly dogmatic father?"

Julius Rush smiled, though he happened at this moment to be in a mood more favorable to frowning. The father and son were traversing the long conservatory which bounded two sides of the drawing-room at Bickington; the former was pressing a point with all the mild warmth and gentle earnestness which he possessed.

"I think, I do think," the squire insisted, holding his son's arm tightly, and carefully adjusting his stride to suit the longer pair of legs—even as he always tried to adjust his thinking to fit the larger mind—"that Miss Kate would be pleased to see us. She must know that you care for her, though you have avoided her so proudly—not that I blame you, my dear son. No, no. I admire your pride and wonder at it. How different was I at your age! But then I was only a tradesman, for whom high spirit would have spelled 'ruin.' You're a gentleman; with every right to let your heart speak. Well, as I was a-saying, she knows you care for her; and she knows I'm not a bullying, hulking sort of fellow to go and crow over her in misfortune. I think she would take a visit from us as a mark of delicate respect; I do think she would understand my motive in coming, would see as I'm anxious in my humble way to show that my respect for her is only increased by what she has gone through. It might even draw her towards me a little; and that way lies your only chance, dear lad, for you'll never begin courting her in earnest until she's kinder to me—will you, now?"

The taciturn captain smiled again at the old man's simple cunning, but the smile was not acquiescent.

"I agree with you," he said, moodily, "as to the increased respect; but it is so few days since that scene at the vicarage. Her pride will still be rankling, and she'll make a scape-goat of you, and insult you, and—and I shall hate her more than I do already!"

"My dear lad, my dear lad," murmured the father, with a kind of despair, "is it possible that you really hate her? Why, she has

never hurt me intentionally; it horrifies me to think that I should be the cause of your estrangement."

"Not another word, father. It is your persistent kindness that makes me hate her so."

The squire grew depressed and silent. He was too simple to comprehend his son, having no conception what pranks the "pangs of disprized love" play with a man. He felt altogether humbled and rebuked, and quite unable to reach up from his own mean level to the lofty mental plane in which his son moved.

"Well, my dear lad," he concluded, with the patient sigh of a meek man who casts aside a cherished scheme, "you shall have your way; we'll keep away from Miss Tredethlyn. And you'll pardon your old dad for being so pressing?—and, pardon me again, dear lad, but if you pull the blooms from that azalea I shall have a dreadful time of it with McTavish!"

"Father," cried Julius, with a kind of wrench of his whole body, "I wish to God you were not so humble!"

"I'm sorry to displease you, Julius. I'll try and do better."

Then the soldier looked so black that the old man trembled.

"Those cursed servants," Julius muttered, with a slow flush creeping up his dark face, "have bullied every bit of life out of you."

The poor old squire was walking on tiptoe now, hardly daring to breathe. He felt the muscles of his son's arm tighten and throb.

Julius walked slowly on, with his face working. He had not been home for some months, and had now returned to find his old father a mere butt for the insolence of his dependants. The servants, pampered, spoiled, unchecked by any hint of the captain's return, had become little short of cruel tyrants to their master. Children, the butler, had a way of crushing him without a word, of letting him know by mere lift of eyebrow that he was but a tailor; and the others, perhaps unhinged by idleness, and the dulness of a country establishment in which little or no entertainment was done, followed Mr. Children's lead with tolerable success.

Things changed somewhat from the moment that the order for preparing the captain's room went forth, but respectfulness is not to be reacquired at a few hours' notice. Julius, noting his father's increased timidity with the men-servants, and judiciously leading him into admissions as to what had been going on during the last month or two, quickly learned enough to make him rage inwardly. He yearned for vengeance; but could catch no one actually tripping. He was as a steel-toothed trap set open in their path; and they

knew it. He had seen enough, however, to justify the dismissal of four or five of them, though his father shivered at so terrible a suggestion.

"What makes me so mad," he said presently between his set teeth, "is that you go through it all for *me*."

This was true enough, for the squire would long ago have given up this big establishment but for his desire to have a home worthy of his son and his son's friends.

"Well, Julius," he admitted, reluctantly, "sometimes I do rather wish myself in a snug little villa, with two or three maids and a man. They—they *have* punished me somewhat of late. I almost think I could see my way to letting you remonstrate with Children and McTavish—not harshly, you know, but—"

"Dear old dad," said the soldier, tenderly as a woman, his voice bringing a delicate flush to the old man's cheek, "I'm going to make what men who have served in India call a *bunderbust* with you. I will pay that visit, and will be at least civil enough to Miss Tredethlyn to get some information as to Simon from her, in return for which you'll give me a free hand with the servants. 'Is't a bargain'? as your modest McTavish would have it."

"But, my dear boy, you—you wouldn't dis—it would pain me to—"

"My dear father, the thing's settled. Put on your hat and coat at once. I'm going to ring for the dog-cart and drive you off to Chillington Vicarage for lunch."

"But—but—my *dear* boy—"

"I shall call for you again precisely at four o'clock, when we shall proceed to the assault of Moor Gates."

Julius drew his trembling father into the hall, helped him into a light top-coat, placed a stick in his hand, led him out onto the gravel sweep, and fairly started him for the west lodge gate, proposing to pick him up in a few minutes' time.

Immediately afterwards Mr. Children received an order which turned his arrogant heart to water.

"Send my cart round at once; I'm going to drive your master into the town. On my return in thirty minutes you will await me in the billiard-room, with all the other servants, gardeners, grooms, helpers—do you hear?"

"Yes, sir. Should you wish—"

"Do you understand my order or not?"

"Yes, sir."

Children withdrew, his florid cheeks paling rapidly.

"It means *the saeck*," he muttered in a sick whisper. "Gawd-forsaken fool that I've been to let slip the best-paid place in the county!"

At the end of half an hour, punctual to the moment, Captain Rush stalked into the billiard-room. In his hand was a heavy riding-whip; his square face was pale, his eyes fierce. As he took up his position upon the hearth-rug, facing the little crowd of men and youths, there was dead silence in the room. Not one pair of eyes could meet the captain's: every man present felt that he above all would be singled out for punishment — and that he had well earned it. But a week or two ago a retired non-commissioned officer of his regiment had been discoursing to them of the young master, declaring him to be one of the tautest captains in the service. Upon his promotion from lieutenant to captain, "A" troop, the rowdiest in the regiment, had been given into his charge, and for four weeks he had made the lives of "A" troop a burden. They used to boast about it afterwards, when they had learned to understand him and swear by him. Briefly, his reputation had a foundation in solid fact.

This stern captain of dragoons now saw before him the faces of those who had been despitefully using the old man for whom he had a protecting love fathoms deep; whose very timidity he reverenced; who had never spoken otherwise than gently to any one of them; whose lavish kindness they had requited with vulgar scorn. It gave him keen pleasure to note how cowed and miserable they looked; nor would he for a time break a silence which they evidently found so punishing. But when his words did come it seemed that the silence must have been full of comfort; he seemed not merely to be speaking, but to be lashing and scourging them with whips. They were ashamed almost to breathe. Yet his language was not violent; he swore not once, but seemed to turn their hearts inside out, and to scorch them through and through. He said things of which the echo would hang about the house for many a long day. When he had finished this strange unconventional address, he dismissed with formal words, Children, the butler, McTavish, Tomlinson, the second footman, and two other delinquents.

Children plucked up courage so far as to say:

"I require a month's warning, sir."

"You require a sound thrashing, sir!" thundered the captain, "and that you'll get if I find you anywhere within the ring-fence of Bickington Park after four o'clock this afternoon."

McTavish also essayed a word or two, but even his overbearing self-confidence had evaporated.

"Ye'll no get anither mon like—" he began, then broke off with a quaver under the captain's gaze.

"Leave my presence at once, you five," proceeded the bitter voice. "Your wages up to this day month will be sent to the butler's pantry. If I find any one of you about the place on my return this afternoon you know what to expect."

They filed out of the room, glad to get beyond reach of the dagger-tongue.

Then Captain Rush spoke more kindly to the remainder. There were some decent men and lads among them, though as usual the black-sheep had set the tune for the rest of the flock to dance to. They were not to be let off too easily, however, and breathed more freely when the signal to depart was at length given them.

Julius Rush laughed grimly to himself when the billiard-room door closed upon the last man. "The dear old dad," he muttered, thrashing his leg so hard as to mark it for a month, though he felt not a stroke at the time—"the dear old dad will have a spell of peace after this. For once in my life I've done something unconventional. Were servants ever treated like this before, I wonder? Even now have they got their deserts? Anyway I have tasted revenge — and I like the flavor."

But the young master had not quite done with them yet; the practice of revenge seemed to have improved his appetite, though not his temper. He made an excellent luncheon, and was served with obsequious alacrity; yet he complained of everything that was done. Not a soul in the house, man or woman, could move or speak aright. Not content with scarifying them as a body, he now proceeded to rate each one separately. They said the devil had got hold of the young master; but they flew to his word of command.

A kind of mute despair had settled down upon the entire household by the time the captain's dog-cart came round; but no temper was exhibited. His fury had obliterated all that, as a thunder-shower the sprinkling of a child's watering-can.

Julius would have no man with him, for he was tired of his own wrath, and wished to relax unseen. It was not easy to quiet himself down, however, his whole system being so charged with indignation; and as he trotted gently between flower-trimmed hedges, and amid the merry flutings of the blackbirds, little spurts of vicious

laughter cleft the scent-laden air. But he was a strong-willed man, and Nature was doing her best to ease him of his humors.

Mr. Rush was almost afraid to look at his son when the cart drew up at the vicarage, but Julius had got himself in hand by then, and was as gentle as a woman with his old father; so calm and serene, indeed, as to make it clear that he had done nothing very terrible.

"Well, Julius," said the squire, a little nervously, as they were mounting the station hill, "I see by your manner that — that you have let those poor fellows off easily?"

"Too easily by half; but that's a forbidden topic. What you have to do, my dear father, is to drink in the sunshine and brace yourself to face Miss Tredethlyn—whom I hate less than I did this morning."

Had Julius allowed his father to guess how deep a tragedy had been enacting at home, he knew that the old man would have been positively incapable of facing Kate for a day or two. Instead of which, he cheered and encouraged him by such little devices as a mother might have used to hearten up a shy young girl, so that when the moment arrived the squire was able to inquire for Miss Tredethlyn with hardly a tremor in his voice.

Some painful seconds ensued, however, for Miss Tredethlyn was having tea in the garden with a friend; and the friend, as they at once perceived on emerging from the house, was Mrs. French-Chichester. During the short walk across the shadow-dappled lawn the squire's courage lapsed away, leaving him a mere bundle of nerves, for the gentle old man had been a good deal shaken by domestic worries lately, and dreaded the popular widow even more than Miss Tredethlyn.

Fortunately it happened that Mrs. French-Chichester had risen to depart, and only stayed long enough to tease Mr. Rush by a few questions on subjects about which he was painfully conscious of his own ignorance. True, in those few minutes she contrived to make the old man wretched, the dragoon furious, and her hostess miserably uncomfortable; but she thereupon shook hands with all three most cordially, and departed, wreathed in smiles.

Then followed an awkward pause, broken only by a remark or two upon the blossom-laden horse-chestnut under which they were sitting.

Kate had been supporting her friend's stinging condolences with the kind of stoicism which is apt to end hysterically, and even in a happier mood would have been deeply embarrassed at receiving

these two—the tailor whom she had openly scorned, the tailor's son whom she, the gin-distiller's granddaughter, had snubbed so haughtily. Had they come to triumph over her she could have faced them without flinching; but she was as clearly conscious of the old gentleman's kindly motives as though he had expounded them for an hour. In truth, she felt more like crying than making conversation, and Captain Rush perceived that the visit would be the dead failure he had expected.

Mr. Rush, after straining his mind almost to the cracking-point for a topic, hazarded an inquiry after Kate's father.

Mr. Tredethlyn was still at Lymport. He had written a letter which, while easing his own mind, had been to Kate's as a tight boot to a tender foot. From the safe vantage-ground of the Royal Hotel he could express himself with a frankness impossible with less than forty miles between himself and Kate; and there was a peculiar charm in thus pouring forth home-truths from a safe distance upon one who was apt to have the best of it in close encounters.

The letter set forth how, from sheer tenderness towards Kate's most obvious weakness, her father had withheld the truth as to her mother's humble origin. Priding herself as she had done almost from childhood upon her superiority to some nine-tenths of her neighbors, it would have been, he conceived, little short of brutal to humiliate her without adequate cause. Now that she knew the worst, she must bear it as best she could. Nell had been in possession of the secret for years, but she was cast, if he might be forgiven for saying so, in a nobler mould than her sister. And let Kate remember that all the comforts and luxuries of her life sprang from this much-despised trade. But for that she must needs have been a poor parson's daughter, bound down to some paltry country village, immersed in mean economies, sighing in vain for decent society. Her father's old Cornish pedigree would have been but a poor solace under the burden of such an environment. Again, his motives in marrying out of his caste had been of the highest, and so on, and so on.

A good deal of the letter was true; and all of it was bitter to its recipient. Mr. Tredethlyn had concluded his not uncongenial task by stating flatly that he had no intention of returning home until Kate should be ready to receive him in a fitting spirit, and refrain from harping upon topics calculated to produce discord in a comfortable home.

It happened that this letter of parental admonition was now to fulfil a purpose quite outside its writer's intentions.

For Kate was in the peculiar wrought-up condition in which a person's real emotional self is apt to burst forth in unexpected fashion. Her wrath against her father had been boiling over for these four days, but anger was now streaked with the self-reproach of a woman generous at the core, and so moved to over-estimate the enormity of her own pettiness. She had been taking herself severely to task for past misconduct to the tailor, and now here was the tailor in person shaming her with fresh kindness, for his delicate respect and sympathy were perfectly visible through the awkwardness of his manner.

Captain Rush, who was observing her with a certain grim coolness, saw something—as much as a member of the blinder sex could be expected to see—of what was passing in her mind, but was far from prepared for what came next; indeed, a sudden fall of snow through the June sunshine might well have amazed him less; for Kate turned upon the old squire—over whose head she had been looking for some years—her clear strong gaze, drew from her pocket her father's stinging letter, and read out to him the portions in which her own failings were handled.

The old man blushed as warmly as herself the while, and looked far more horrified.

"My dear," he said, shakily rising, hat in hand, while a snow of delicate chestnut petals fluttered down upon his gray head—"my dear—if you'll forgive an old man calling you so just this once—I can't abear to see you vex yourself so; my respect for you is more hearty than ever it was afore. I can't express myself as I should like, but do put up the letter, there's a dear. I do think your father's very 'ard—I should say hard—upon you; and—and I'm a'most too flustered to say anythink else."

Kate folded the letter up as steadily as she could, and resumed her seat.

There was to be no more demonstration, though there is no knowing to what sentimental length the pair might have gone but for the presence of a critical third person.

No sign came from Captain Rush, but his heart danced for a moment or two. He admitted to himself that Kate had done well; that the reading of this indictment against herself amounted to a full apology for past rudeness to his father. But, though she had risen in his esteem, his sullen pride was yet far from the melting

point. He could be good friends with Kate in future, but would lower himself no more by the offer of unacceptable homage.

Wishing to brace up the pair and give a lighter tone to the conversation, he offered to give them an account of his dealings with the servants at Bickington.

Mr. Rush listened to the curt narrative, holding fast to his chair, palpitating with excitement, his face a moving picture of horror and admiration, dread and relief. "How terribly hard of you," he seemed to say, "yet how bold! How terrifying, yet infinitely comforting!" Presently terror mastered the other feelings.

"But, my dear son," he murmured, shakily, "how shall I face them now?"

"There'll be none to face. The five whom I dismissed will be out of sight before we return."

"D—do you think so?"

"I know it," said Julius, grimly.

"They have only got their deserts," cried Kate, eagerly; "and I wish I had been there to see justice done upon them." Her eyes and the captain's flashed together for a moment, then parted slowly.

The squire's terror died gradually but surely. There ensued a relief deep as an ocean, calm as a sleeping infant. The rich beauty of the opening summer seemed to emerge for him as from a veil withdrawn. He leaned back and drank in the world of sun and blossom, murmuring:

"Children gone, and McTavish—never to return!"

"Never, dear old dad," muttered Julius; and perhaps he and Kate were also inclined to detect subtle beauties where mere grass and flowers had been. At any rate, they began to talk to each other, while the squire listened in luxurious silence, and thought the millennium had come.

Captain Rush explained how anxious he was to see Simon; how his father had made one or two more efforts to do so, and been rebuffed; how his own letters had remained unanswered. Did Miss Tredethlyn think there was any hope of getting at his friend? Could she tell him anything as to Simon's plans and intentions?

Kate, being the only person whom Simon ever received as a visitor, could answer most questions about him; indeed, it was no small relief to be able to discuss Simon and his situation with those who cared for him, instead of proclaiming his innocence to deaf ears.

"I shall be glad to talk of him," she said, turning her eyes towards the Hollacomb vale, a glimpse of which was visible through the lilacs, "though it is rather a mournful subject. Poor old Simon! You wouldn't be surprised at his neglect of your letters, Captain Rush, if your could get a glimpse of him now. He is changed—so soured and broken-spirited and cynical that you would hardly know him. I fear he deserves his nickname now. 'Timon of Chillington' he has become in very truth."

Kate then told them, with an unusual thrill in her voice, the story already known to the reader of Joyce's death, and of her charge to Simon.

"This sad business," she proceeded, "was of some service to Simon. The responsibility of the child's guardianship is good for him, and the mother's pathetic circumstances rekindled an old idea in his mind. Among his hundred schemes you may have heard him speak of that of founding a hospital for the dying. Such a thing has been discussed in the magazines and public journals, and the stories told of working girls and women overtaken by disease, and hiring garrets in which to die, took a deep hold of Simon. The hospital was to have been a great undertaking, properly organized and equipped, but his many failures have humbled poor old Simon. He told me that he had no spirit for another big failure; but wishing to make one last experiment before leaving the country for good, he proposed to turn Hollacomb Farm into a small hospital for homeless people to die in, surrounded at least with decent care and moderate comfort. Of course I encouraged him—and now the thing's done, as you know, Mr. Rush."

"Yes, I've heard about it, Miss Kate, but should like to hear more; and nearly all this is news to my son."

"Well, he has arranged for four beds, and a trained nurse, and Mr. Syme is the medical attendant, and there's really little more to tell. The thing is all on a small scale, but quite a success at present. The patients have shown themselves grateful to Simon, and little Rose makes the dying people smile as she patters in and out of the rooms. The woods look beautiful now, and sometimes the poor things are carried out beside the canal, as if to take a last farewell of trees and flowers and sunshine; and altogether there's a strange beauty and pathos, as of mournful music, about the place—and I don't know that I care to talk about it any more."

For a moment or two the white blossoms fell upon a silent party; then Kate resumed, turning abruptly to Captain Rush with the air of one resolved not to shirk a painful topic.

"I hope you side with me against Simon's accusers?"

"My mind is dark upon that question," he answered, slowly. "I can't believe what they say, yet know not how to disbelieve it thoroughly."

"He's the last man in God's universe to wrong a poor girl and leave her to destroy herself," said the old man, solemnly; "and I feel in my heart that the Almighty will one day see the innocent righted and the guilty punished."

Kate looked wistful, but full of doubt. Julius Rush looked bitter and sceptical.

"The world's a seething mass of innocent suffering," he muttered.

"If I were but a man—" began Kate, impulsively.

"What could you do?" the soldier retorted with asperity. "What could you do for a man who won't even assert his own innocence? who won't see a friend? won't answer a friend's letters?"

"Fight for him behind his back—fight tooth and nail to see him righted—that's what I could do. And can you wonder at his hopeless kind of silence when every one condemns him, even his own father and his once-friend Terence—even my sister, who I did think knew him better? Were I a man," she continued, with kindling eyes and a contemptuous glance at the one who seemed so lukewarm in a friend's cause, "I would labor and strive, and ransack and delve and rummage till I had plucked out the heart of this mystery, and removed the blot upon the honor of one whom I believe to be nothing short of a hero."

Rush still looked unmoved; seemingly he refused to be inoculated with Kate's ardor. Perhaps he took a perverse pleasure in not showing his better side, perhaps was minded to prolong an indignant outburst which pleased him; at any rate, his face was inscrutable. His cool, unimpressed attitude certainly incited Kate to fresh efforts. She waxed sarcastic as well as warm.

"Sometimes," she resumed, "I'm inclined to think, with Mrs. French-Chichester, that man is literally all self, a creature bound to his own *ego* as to a post, and railed round with iron spikes of self-interest. I speak to my father of Simon, and he shrugs his shoulders without a word; to the vicar, and he looks blank as a wall and fetches a hopeless sigh; to Terence, and he changes the subject with an angry jerk of his head."

"But my son has been away all these months," urged Mr. Rush, anxiously.

"I'm talking generalities," snapped Kate.

"Rather particular generalities," the captain remarked, dryly.

"I shall be more particular directly. I say it's a shame, a burning shame, that no hand should be raised to help Simon. He'll leave the country soon for good—for I know his plans—drift away into the world without a spoken regret to follow him, without a soul to care whether he lives or dies."

"I fear it will be so," sighed Mr. Rush, "though already there's a feeble sort of reaction in his favor. Many a time have I heard 'em jeer at his schemes and hobbies, and explain away his merits, as people are so clever at doing. But I do think this last matter of the hospital has set 'em wondering a bit; and they do speak kind of him here and there just now."

"Oh yes," quoth Kate, "most people keep a little justice and charity locked up somewhere in chests and drawers, and offer us a spoonful or two when the struggle's over and we need it no more. Why, we may look for kindness even, once we're past using it!"

"I'm bound to say, however"—the exasperating captain seemed bent upon trying Kate's temper to the utmost—"that Simon has not yet given his public a chance of unlocking the chests and drawers you were speaking of."

Kate glared at the speaker and relapsed into silence. Mr. Rush murmured something deprecating at his son, but was quenched by a single glance.

Julius proceeded with an unruffled front and the assurance of one who is complete master of the field.

"And now, Miss Tredethlyn, as I have listened to your strictures with some patience, you will perhaps allow me to explain that I had, even before coming here, made a resolution to undertake the quest which you have urged upon me with such eloquence — indeed, that the object of our visit was simply the gaining of information that might further that undertaking. I *intend* to penetrate the mystery, and shall give all my spare time to the quest until some solution can be arrived at. But I believe that to rush at it in an impulsive feminine sort of way would be to court failure."

Kate still wore a frown; but a smile might be read between the lines of it.

"Why didn't you say so before?" she asked, the fire in her eyes still smouldering.

He made no answer, though his square chin seemed to say, "You never gave me a chance!"

"May I ask what your plan of campaign may be, Captain Rush?"

"In the first place, I propose to employ a private detective. Has that intention your approval?"

"Certainly not. This is not a case for a mere common professional man; it needs sympathetic insight of a special character to penetrate the motives of a man like Simon."

"I'm sorry you don't approve; but I shall try the detective."

"When he has failed," said Kate, icily, "perhaps you will again come to me for advice."

"Very likely. What would you in that case suggest?"

"I should say, go and consult Ezekiel Doidge. That man cares more than any living person about finding out the truth of the matter; and he has in his possession all the trinkets, letters, and such things of his dead sweetheart. He is shrewd, too, and keen as a sleuth-hound. I believe you and Mr. Doidge together might delve out the heart of the mystery. You might right Simon in the face of all men, restore him to his father, save for him his patrimony, which now stands to be thrown to the dogs or handed over to public charities; and so might earn the deep gratitude of the one or two friends he has left in the world."

"I'm glad you're hopeful, but shall try my own plan first."

"I don't doubt that for an instant. And the plan will fail."

"Not until it has had a fair trial, however."

Captain Rush then turned to his father and suggested that it was time to be going; and the squire, of course, rose obediently to the hint. Miss Tredethlyn and Julius then exchanged a final defiant glance, and the party broke up, the squire carrying with him a treasure in the shape of a new and piquant sensation. Kate had warmly pressed his hand.

CHAPTER XXX

What of Terence Clancy since we saw him some months ago? He has enjoyed good health, and, at least to the superficial observer, such an average allowance of happiness as every man who has not actually committed a murder considers his due. His practice grows and flourishes; his popularity, so far from being on the wane, has deepened and widened. He esteems and reverences his wife more than ever, and still loves her a good deal. Yet Terence has still a reserve fund of unsatisfied desires, and is in possession of several pegs good enough to hang self-pity upon.

His beautiful wife, for instance, is from one point of view a somewhat costly possession, involving the maintenance of a high moral level of daily life, the breathing of an ethical atmosphere too fine for perfect comfort. What his nature really demands of woman is a smooth caressing tolerance, a sympathetic acceptance of the bad in him as well as the good, a tender worship of Terence Clancy as he stands. Now Nell has measured him for a hero, and her insistently high opinion of him seems to hang upon him like the proverbial giant's robe; insomuch that it is a relief sometimes to get among inferior women, with no troublesome ideal to be lived up to.

Even in his professional rounds he feels that Nell's eye is upon him. She is always keeping him up to the mark, always thinking of how to clear off that tiresome debt to Simon. Yet she never nags or harasses him, and he freely admits to himself that, without her constant encouragement, he would before now have sunk into abject idleness. For Terence hates work, and knows that he does. The drudgery of his profession sits so heavily upon him that at times he has it in him to sell the practice and live in a cottage on the proceeds.

Such minor troubles seem to call for attention first as being the most insistent, and those most often discussed with a man's self. But of the deeper pains that gnaw silently, and cling miasma-like about the secret parts of the soul, Terence has some knowledge.

Here, again, Nell is in a measure to blame. With a wife of lower moral calibre his conscience would not be so uneasy; but Nell is

like a fire near which self-comforting sophistry shrivels up and dies. To be happy with a woman of an honesty so rigid, of so crystal-clear a conscience, he should either be a much better man or a much worse; either as spotless as herself, or free enough from virtuous prejudice to despise her ideal and laugh over it in secret. As it is, what might have been but a speck upon his consciousness is an ugly blotch which time fails to erase. His sin of treachery to Simon is not "ever before him," but it underlies other things and crops up just when he looks for peace.

But, confession being a thing that he has ceased even to contemplate as a possibility, there remains to Terence nothing but the weak man's anodyine—compromise. He is aware that public opinion is softening towards Simon, and can afford to take comfort from that knowledge. For he has little to fear on his own account now—the hue-and-cry being practically over — and in time people will doubtless come to forgive the supposed culprit, and allow his many good deeds to counterpoise that one bad slip. As to Sir Hamo, Terence fully intends to bring about a reconciliation between him and Simon. He means to change his own views gradually, to become, after a time, doubtful as to Simon's guilt, to lead the old man along the groove of this changed attitude until he shall be ready to take back his son into favor.

As Terence and his wife are now so frequently at the Hall, sometimes living there for several weeks in succession, this plan seems the more feasible. Meanwhile, Sir Hamo's romantic affection for Nell grows, rather than diminishes, with declining health—a state of things that no one perceives more clearly than Mrs. French-Chichester. She begins to perceive that all her pains will probably result in the substitution of Nell Clancy in the place of Kathleen French-Chichester successor to Simon the prodigal. Other shrewd observers, too, are speculating as to the outcome of Sir Hamo's fatherly love, hinting slyly that Clancy is playing his cards well. But herein their shrewdness was much astray, for mercenary calculations had no place among Terence's faults; and the prospect of seeing Nell enriched at Simon's expense, had it occurred to him at all, would only have increased his existing mental harassments.

And one thing more must be touched upon—for now we are upon the subject of that somewhat shattered thing, poor Terence's conscience, it were well to make a clean breast — there is yet another secret weighing upon the man, and this one pricks the sharper for being of a professional nature.

For, if somewhat false and fickle in other relations, Terence has been hitherto without blemish professionally—or had been up to the time of Doidge's denunciation of Simon. From the small frauds and trickeries practised by medical men of crooked tendencies he had kept free; in fact, to do him full justice, had been a perfectly honest doctor. But in respect of this one patient, Ezekiel Doidge, there was now deep unrest in his mind.

His physical examination of Doidge on the night before the cricket-club meeting had exercised Terence's diagnosing faculty severely. There had been no actual revelation, such as would compel him at once to take action or to give up calling himself an honest man; but certain subtle indications, meaningless to a man of ordinary ability, though to his analytical sense suggestive of the presence of a mortal disease. He had, of course, intended to examine the patient further when opportunity should arise, but his dread of being brought into contact with Ezekiel had resulted in procrastination.

Meanwhile he sopped his conscience by causing his assistant, Jack Syme, to put the patient through a searching examination, which resulted, however, simply in a verdict of general nervous debility.

So far, well; but since then, possibly owing to Nell's unconscious influence, Terence's better self had been worrying him somewhat in the following fashion: "Syme has but commonplace ability; you might almost as well have handed over your patient to a solicitor or a parson; and you never gave Syme the key of your suspicion, you never once breathed the word 'aneurism.' You ought to investigate the case yourself without delay. If the man has an aortic aneurism it will, unless properly treated, grow steadily; one day it will burst, and he'll fall dead in a heap. How will you feel about it then, Terence Clancy? You should at once take steps to verify your suspicions; if they hold good he should be laid on his back, kept from all excitement, dosed with iodide, treated like cracked china."

Upon this aneurism, or enlargement of a great blood-vessel, Terence's mind kept running; but still he took no step beyond the construction, and subsequent demolition, of a whole series of good resolutions. To make up his mind to see Doidge was a nightly task, to escape the task through pressure of other business a daily achievement. But the mental perturbation increased, while his fear of Ezekiel lessened. There came a day, some two weeks after Julius Rush's entry upon the new quest, when Terence had knit himself up to the requisite pitch, and was actually on his way to the mill, proposing to consult Doidge upon some question of the Angling Asso-

ciation, then in course of conversation to speak of his health, and so work his way on by degrees to the needful examination.

Terence found it quite a journey to Doidge's mill, which lay but a short distance above the town. He walked rapidly as far as the town bridge, but at that point his ardor slackened. He began to think of other patients having claims upon his prompt attention; his will began to ooze away as though his mind had sprung a leak somewhere. Fingers seemed to beckon him north, south, and west, while every fibre of him shrank from the eastward road. But Nell, who had unknowingly driven him hither, urged him to fresh effort; the thought of returning to her with one stain washed from his conscience stiffened the yielding will. He walked on again, stopping here and there, pausing and loitering, but not once turning back.

Now at length he was past the cemetery; now had reached the second bridge over the Chilling, and the murmur of the stream was full of depression for him. The mill was now barely fifty yards distant; the hum and beat of its machinery were even more distasteful than the noise of the river.

There was nothing picturesque about Doidge's flour-mill. It consisted of a group of new stone buildings, placed astride the Chilling, and having a physiognomy suggestive of business energy and solid success. Above the roofs towered a tall brick chimney, for Doidge used steam as well as water power; many wheels were plashing, many stones grinding; whitened men were working busily; clerks coming to and from the office; carts piled with sacks passing in and out of the spacious yard.

As Clancy entered this yard the busy workaday aspect of the place impressed him in a wholesome fashion, for in so bustling and cheerful scene there was nothing for morbid fear to fasten upon. Strolling into the office for a moment or two, he further steadied his nerves by a little gossip with Doidge's foreman; and thereafter marched through the flower-garden to the miller's front door with a better head of courage than he had been able to muster since leaving the town bridge.

"Yes, Mr. Doidge was at home, but engaged"—Terence's heart leaped; "yet doubtless he would see Dr. Clancy"—the heart sank again.

Terence was conducted down a long passage into a small wainscoted parlor, the miller's favorite sitting-room. Its one window looked out upon a breadth of meadow land, cattle-trimmed, intersected by the shining river; and all the land visible from the arm-

chair by the window was Ezekiel's own. Thence he could watch a long reach of the stream, issuing forth occasionally to pounce upon any ticketless stranger whose rod might be seen waving on either bank.

Doidge was seated here to-day, but with his back to the light, and never a thought going poacherward.

He rose eagerly to greet Terence, his eyes gleaming, his hands and limbs jerking nervously. Seated at the table, with a cigar between his teeth, was Captain Julius Rush.

Clancy drew a deep breath of relief; for though conscious that Rush disliked him heartily, he was ready to greet as a friend in need any one who should make the dreaded tête-à-tête impossible.

The slightest of greetings passed between the dragoon and the doctor; then the latter seated himself hastily, and, with the air of one who has not a moment to spare, put a question to Doidge bearing upon certain rights of the Angling Association.

The miller waved the question aside impatiently—

"Can't talk about that nonsense now, doctor; we've got somethin' a deal more important in hand. Captain"—he turned abruptly to his other guest—"I move we take Dr. Clancy into our confidence!"

Captain Rush shook his head and threw one leg over the other impatiently; but Doidge was wont to follow his own wishes, while regarding those of other people as whims. Accordingly, he remained upon his feet, and emphasizing each sentence with his restless hand, began to explain why Captain Rush had come to see him, and how vigorously he was about to plunge into Captain Rush's quest.

The latter, having now no choice as to making a confidant of Clancy, and perhaps expecting to get one or two useful hints from him, detailed to both listeners the steps he had already taken. He had begun by getting a private detective down from town, equipping him with such information as he possessed, and setting him to work in a business-like fashion; and, after ten days of careful investigation, the infallible professional had this morning delivered his report and verdict—to the effect that the case was clear as day, that Mr. Secretan was, without a shadow of doubt, the guilty party.

"The numskull!" cried Ezekiel, with a stamp; "the addle-pated fool! Just what a damned professional idiot like that would say!"

"Then you agree with my father and myself?" asked Rush. "I quite expected to find a difficulty in bringing you round to our view of the question."

"Look here!" cried the miller, in a blaze of excitement, "first I'm

going to swear you both to secrecy, then I shall be free to put you up to a thing or two . . . God's truth, what ails you, sir? You'm as white as a sheet!"

"Rather faint," muttered Clancy, shakily; "throw up the window, will you? I had a bad cropper on the last day of the hunting season—you'll remember it, Rush?—and I've been liable to go faint like this ever since. I'm half afraid there's some internal injury."

"Lord, Lord, and I've never so much as offered you a drink!" Doidge hastily drew a decanter of whiskey and some glasses from the cupboard. "Come, have a liquor, doctor; 'tis fine old whiskey, and will straighten you up in no time. Captain, have a glass, sir, and pardon my forgetfulness. Damme, sirs, let us drink success to the new chase! I reckon us 'll kill afore the month's out. Come, fill up, Dr. Clancy. Here's to a hot scent and a fast run!"

Terence filled with his back to the others. The strong draught brought the blood back to his cheeks, his spirits began to rise. He felt now as a man with back to wall and face to foe; to fight had at last become easier than to run away. His brain had become intensely clear, every nerve was now on the alert; he had never realized until this moment his own power and skill and cunning. He felt this sickly hysterical enemy to be as a mere child in his hands; he perceived, too, the enormous advantage to himself of thus being called to a seat at the enemy's council-board, of knowing every hostile move before it could be put into execution. Surely the veriest fool, with such odds in his favor, might expect to nonplus them! He drank again, and turned genially to his host.

"Grand whiskey, this, Mr. Doidge. You dispense a medicine worth more than my whole drug-shop put together. I'm right as a trivet again already; let us hear what you were going to say."

"I'm to understand clearly that I have your promise of secrecy? That you'll both keep fast hold o' your tongues until such time as I loose 'em?"

The soldier nodded gravely. The doctor cried, boisterously:

"Aye, aye, fire away, man; don't kill us with suspense!"

"Then, harkee, you two"—Doidge bent forward, fixing upon them eyes brilliant with excitement—"I've been hunting false all along. Mr. Secretan had nothin' to do with my poor girl's trouble; never made love to her; had no hand whatever in bringing about her death."

"Ah!" murmured the captain, with a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"How do you know that?" asked Clancy, in a dry, sceptical voice.

Doidge detailed hurriedly how he had tracked Simon, been on the point of shooting him, and in the nick of time had learned the truth from Joyce's words.

Terence paled again. The picture of this crazed fellow dogging his enemy night after night, gun in hand, filled him with a creeping sickness. He drank again, and took a fresh grip of his courage.

"He's a fool, a crazy monomaniac," he kept repeating to himself. "I shall outwit him to a certainty."

"Yes," concluded the miller, "I had my finger crooked on the trigger; 'twas Joyce that saved his life."

"But suppose he had hoodwinked the woman?"

"Impossible, doctor. Joyce was Mary's bosom friend, and in all her secrets. It wa'n't Secretan, I tell you. Joyce's voice bored the fact of his innocence right into me. He's blameless as I am—more so, for he watched over her, while I never stirred a finger to save her."

"In that case," interposed Rush, "I must trouble you to proclaim my friend's innocence at once. He has borne another man's blame long enough."

"Lookee, captain, you'm a bit simpler than I thought. Can't you see that by keeping up that fiction we lull the real man into seeming security—that Mr. Secretan's supposed guilt is a ready-made stalking-horse for we?"

"I can see," retorted the captain, stormfully, "that it's a cursed shame to let him live another day uncleared, and, what's more, I won't permit such a thing!"

"I don't care about you, or your friend, or any one else. I don't care who suffers, or what happens, or whether I live or die, so I find out Mary's murderer!"

"I'll force you to clear Secretan!"

"I have your promise," shouted Doidge, cursing furiously. "You'm no gentleman, no man, if you go back on your word; you'm a cur even to talk of betrayin' me!"

Here was a brave beginning; with his enemies knocking their heads together thus, Terence might well afford to grow hopeful.

"I decline further speech with you. Go your own way, and I'll go mine. You're no better than a madman. I must have broken with you anyway, for I see you mean murder. I'll have none of that. I'll have a curb put on you somehow."

Captain Rush arose, clutching his hat and stick, and regarding poor Doidge with angry contempt. Terence already felt that the plot had collapsed, that he himself would be the miller's coadjutor; but this hopeful conclusion was a thought too hasty, the danger was not yet over.

For as Ezekiel, swelling and scowling with indignation, stood watching the captain's exit, he put forth his hand to grasp the table, and touched a writing-desk which had been lying there since the beginning of the interview. He looked down at the desk, and his face changed.

"Don't go, sir," he muttered, brokenly. "Lord forgive me for helpin' to spoil my poor girl's chance! Stand by me, sir, even though I be a hot-tongued fool. I ain't fit to hunt the man down alone; my strength has been failin' these months; and—and I can't do nothin' without help, nowadays. Don't be afeard that I mean any violence; I tried that tack once and found I had no stomach for't; too much of a coward for that, now my health's gone—too much broke and wore out and shattered, I reckon! There's a Bible yonder; I'll take my oath on't, if you like."

"What is your intention, then? I don't move a step with you till I know that, Doidge."

"To track him down," said Ezekiel, solemnly laying his hand upon the desk; "to spend every bit o' health and energy left me, and every farthin' I possess, in findin' him out and bringin' ruin on him."

"I have your solemn promise to drop all thought of violence?"

"You have, sir. An' for my poor girl's sake, stand by a poor devil who ha'n't more than a year or two left to work in."

"You're not fit for this strain and excitement, Doidge," the doctor interposed. "I warn you distinctly that you're shortening your life by going on thus. Give up this insane pursuit and lead a quiet life, taking care never to overtask or over-excite yourself, and your health may be restored."

"I'm cool enough now," said Ezekiel, "and I sha'n't break out again. I'm gettin' hopeful, and that does me good. With the help o' you two I'll get through this job, after which I don't care what comes to me. Look here, sir"—he turned to Captain Rush as the latter resumed his seat—"you can guess what things I have put away in this desk?"

The soldier nodded gravely. Terence shuddered and palpitated. The faintness was coming over him again, and the worst moment

was yet to be faced. He knew not what relics of poor Mary's dead romance were to be laid before him. No thinkable ordeal could have been more painful to him than this that was coming. Even Doidge himself, had he known all, could hardly have devised for his enemy a sharper punishment. He had to bend over the desk with the others, but contrived to stand behind them, leaning heavily upon a corner of the table, and once more the extremity of his danger was fortifying.

The soldier looked down with sympathy and interest as Doidge unlocked the desk and threw back the cover. Ezekiel himself seemed transformed for the moment; his animal passions seemed to fall away, as though he were in the actual presence of his dead love; his hand strayed forward as a mother's towards a sleeping child.

He first drew forth a ring, a dainty little thing set with a single pearl of small value.

Terence felt the sting of tears in his eyes; he remembered Mary's humble joy on receiving the trinket, how she had kissed it and cried over it, and been silent for an hour after he had placed it on her finger. Almost he had it in him to cry aloud, "The culprit stands here before you. Do your worst; for you can't hate him more bitterly than he hates himself!"

But when the miller handed to Captain Rush a copy of Moore's *Melodies*, Terence's remorseful longing was at once obliterated by fear. There would be his own handwriting to greet him from the title-page. He turned away for one insupportable moment.

"Title-page torn out," remarked Rush, grimly; "evidently the poor girl has spared no pains to baffle us. Nothing but a few marks and annotations in pencil—all half erased. This book will not advance us an inch upon our way. Have you no letters or notes, or even a single line in the man's handwriting?"

"Not a line," sighed Doidge.

Under this new encouragement Terence's crushed spirit uprose; he was able to handle the relics — one or two more books, some dried forget-me-nots, and other trifling keepsakes—and to offer a few appropriate comments upon the difficulties of the situation.

There was nothing more to be examined; but they sat long discussing a plan of campaign, Terence bearing his part with the others, and skilfully laying false tracks for them whenever an opportunity arose. Under his delicate manipulation they were always kept wide of the true road; but the strain and stress of his position told heavily upon him the while. When they at length separated he felt

weak and shattered and full of gloomy foreboding; nor was his conscience eased one jot in respect of Ezekiel's physical condition, for he had noted more than one subtle token tending to substantiate his fears—or were they now hopes?

Slowly and painfully Terence dragged himself up the hill towards the White House, yearning only to throw himself upon Nell's mercy, entreat her to take him out of the miserable net in which he had become entangled, to begin with him a new life in some distant country.

CHAPTER XXXI

While Terence was working out at the mill the sentence pronounced upon him by Nemesis, Nell was sitting at home indulging in morbid introspection. This was not a usual failing of hers, but Terence's restless, unsettled condition was beginning to make its mark upon his wife. She had not the comfortable stupidity which blunders cheerfully along, unperceptive of, and consequently unharassed by, any but its own personal cares, nor had she now that absolute trust in Terence which would some months ago have attributed his troubled state to the wear of professional anxieties or other legitimate causes. His disquiet now filled her with a dull pain, for which the routine of household duties was no sufficient antidote.

Towards the end of the forenoon she took her work down to a rustic seat among the shrubs at the bottom of the garden, resolving to ply her needle hard, and leave thinking alone altogether. As well have made up her mind to let breathing alone; thought but flowed the swifter for being dammed up by will for a brief period.

Nell began to review her life since marriage with a candor she had never before permitted herself. Hitherto self-blame had sufficed when anything had to be explained away, but now reason demanded that Terence too should be criticised. It seemed that she must either blame him mildly, or herself grow bitter; must let the dissatisfied corner of her mind have its say before she could perceive how best to undertake Terence's defence. He still loved and reverenced her. With these grand central facts to support her she could surely afford to consider his little failings with calmness. For instance, let it be frankly admitted that he had a certain tender flirting way with women that often gave her jealous pangs, a certain crying need for the confidence and sympathy of every pretty girl who crossed his path. Well, this was, after all, nothing but an efflorescence of good-nature. She ought to take shame to herself for such paltry jealousy.

Again, Terence had a little weakness, which she now touched upon with a quick, pained flush, for small falsehoods—mere blarneyings sometimes, doubtless springing from the same source as the other

weakness. She had herself a powerful bias in the direction of strict truth; but, then, Terence was far more good-natured than she, and over-kindness is surely an amiable failing. She had noticed a similar tendency in his two little brothers, now domiciled at the White House, and going daily to the best school in the town. Towards these little red-headed fellows Nell had played the part of a true mother; but their trickiness had somehow diluted the affection she had tried hard to give them. They were rough, noisy, and without any of Terence's physical refinement; indeed, to be perfectly frank, they were common-looking. But had they been honest boys, Nell felt that she could have loved them well.

This kindly moral weakness of her husband's sometimes produced a dull ache in Nell's mind, as well as a sense of alarmed expectation. There were possibilities about him not hitherto suspected. The mind which had been to her as an open book was discovered to have dim corners into which she feared to penetrate. He had certainly deceived her, or allowed her to glide into an erroneous impression, as to his people; for it was clear, from a dozen explanatory trifles let fall by the small brothers, that the Clancys were not exactly the poor gentle-folks pictured to herself and others. Nor would Terence on any account allow her to pay them a visit.

"They are a bit rough at home, dear," he had explained once or twice. "And, you see, I had to blarney you a bit, or maybe you'd never have learned to love me."

This, with a smile and a caress, adjusted the matter perfectly, as he thought, and was very honest and straightforward to boot; but there was a "but" involved here, as in other matters, when viewed with Nell's eyes.

In brief, it will be seen that the denuding forces of real life had been paring down the ideal image of a husband that Nell had set up, as wind, rain, and frost wear away even hard rock. She had resisted the denudation with all the power of a strong, loyal nature, but the figure had been slowly "weathered" nevertheless.

As Nell came to this admission in the course of her thinking, some tears fell upon the work with which her hands were resolutely busy. She perceived, moreover, that there was nothing to be done; by no conceivable treatment could she infiltrate strict honesty into a character like Terence's. It was like a sieve, very suitable for holding ordinary grain, but incapable of retaining the fine gold-dust of absolute truth. Had this disillusion come suddenly she might have despaired; but so gradual had been the process that her pres-

ent task consisted of the mere summing up of previous impressions, and the spreading out of their results for inspection.

Nor was she one to sit still and allow a grievance to ravage her heart and mind at its will, for Nell had the combative spirit that loves not surrender. Having allowed herself to draw the veil from truth, she would neither cover it up again nor shrink from regarding it. It was clear to her that she must either readjust her conception of life, learning to take things and people as they are, or sink into a state of permanent morbid depression. She must, in fact, learn to take Terence as a whole, together with all his limitations, to love him in spite of his failings. The decision cheered and strengthened her; and, being unaware that her relation to Terence was of a kind as old as the human race, her solution of the difficulty one of the most ordinary and inevitable in the long history of woman's love, she felt something of an inventor's triumph. It appeared that she had done a clever thing, as well as the right thing; wherefore her self-respect was increased, her conscience satisfied.

When the boys came home from school, Nell went up the garden to welcome them. They rushed in, bawling, stamping, and banging doors, but they clung to and caressed her as a mother. To them, at least, she had done her duty straitly, so here again she felt cheered.

Presently she saw them fairly started upon a fishing excursion, heavily victualled, and burning with enthusiasm, and herself returned to the garden with some of their good spirits reflected on her face.

Upon emerging from the bushes she found Terence, somewhat to her surprise, reclining on the garden-seat. He must have come in by the lower gate in the wall; and she perceived at once from his attitude that something was wrong with him. He looked harassed and overwrought, and, as he caught sight of his wife, his face took an expression of something like terror.

Nell was almost rejoiced to find him thus with his trouble at the climax point. Now was her opportunity for bold entry upon the new course. She would force his confidence, as she ought to have done long ago, and inoculate him with her own growing courage. She sat down close beside her husband, laying a slender hand enticingly upon his shoulder.

"What is it, Terence dear? Has something upset you? or is it that you've been overworked lately? I know there has been something on your mind, and blame myself for not being more sympathetic and considerate the last few weeks. You must forgive me,

dear, and let me share your troubles, for really, really I'm not so very hard-judging; at least, I won't be any more."

The young wife looked very sweet and winning as she bent over him with parted lips and eyes full of sympathy; but her look and touch were too much for Terence in his present state. What dregs of spirit and courage the trying scene at the mill had left him evaporated, and a gush of profound self-pity overwhelmed him. He sank on his knees beside Nell, buried his head in her lap, and sobbed like a child.

Nell put her arms about his neck, and they wept together, and this miserable moment had a core of strange happiness for them both. The constraint which had been growing between husband and wife was broken down. Nell felt that all his faults were being swept away in the outrush of her pity, that he was all her own, to be cherished and comforted and loved; while he felt that, come what might, she loved him; that this love of a wife, noble and faultless in his eyes, was a thing to lean upon and take refuge in. Could he but keep this, he might hope to bear up against whatsoever shame or disgrace might be in store for him.

"Dearest, tell me your trouble," urged Nell, with courage in her voice as well as tenderness. "Let me bear it with you. Won't you let your own wife help you?"

"I'm miserable, Nell, miserable," he groaned. "There's a bitter enemy seeking to ruin me."

"What can he do? What possible hold can he have upon you? Won't you tell me?"

There was a flutter of Nell's eyes now, but she managed to keep it out of her voice.

"He'll ruin me, Nell! I tell you he has power to do it."

"What is it, Terence? Oh, pray tell me at once?"

"You shrink from me already—I feel that you shrink from me."

"No, I don't shrink; but the suspense tortures me. It would comfort me to know the worst at once."

"Nell, you might hate me if I told you."

"I could never hate you, Terence—I think not, I hope not, I'm sure not!"

"Could you give up a great deal for me? hold fast to me through —through heavy troubles?"

"I know that I could," she answered, proudly. "If there be any money difficulty, do not hesitate to tell me all. We can give up our house, go into a mere cottage, and work harder. I don't fear

poverty; I only fear lest this wretched secret may eat away our love if you persist in withholding from me your confidence. Tell me all, I entreat you."

"Could you even leave the country with me, and begin life anew in a foreign land?"

"I could do that and more." Nell's answer came without hesitation; but her face was getting pale and drawn, she had begun to dread the coming revelation exceedingly.

Terence, feeling how her arms and hands trembled, grew fearful again; his heart sank lower and lower. The anguish of confessing all was too sharp to be faced, and a half-confession was not possible. He might bring himself to say, "I was Mary Pethick's lover," were it not that this one statement would involve the further admission—"I have let Simon bear my punishment all these months." To the first offence he might plead guilty; to the second, never. Nothing should ever drag from him the admission of his treachery to Simon; he could neither abase himself so low, nor exalt Simon to such a pitch. There was jealousy involved as well as fear; the two together overmastered him now, and would continue to do so to the end of the chapter. His fit of despair was passing, too. The mere giving way to his emotions and outpouring of his heaviness had given him relief; a sanguine streak was already illumining his depression. He began to perceive that he had too readily given way to panic and pessimism. What danger worthy of all this fright was attachable to a few faded flowers and a book with half-erased annotations? The sight of the ring had scared him most, but he began to reflect now upon the extreme improbability of its leading to any discovery. He had bought it at a small jeweller's shop, buried in the most crowded part of Lymport, a great seaport town. He was a perfect stranger to the shopman, had paid in gold for the ring without even mentioning his name; he had scarcely been in the shop five minutes. Tush! conscience should make a puling coward of him no longer.

But this same cowardice had already landed Terence in a dilemma. How was he to satisfy this anxious wife of his? He remained with his face buried in her lap, thinking how to solve the new problem.

Meanwhile the suspense was telling upon Nell. His talk of leaving the country was full of alarming suggestion. Was he about to confess some crime? Was her affection, already somewhat bruised and strained, to be put to some insupportable test?

"Nell!"

"Yes, dear." Her voice trembled now, and her breath came short; his long silence had made self-control very difficult.

"Have I frightened you, little Nell?"

"A little, Terence."

"Sure I was always a morbid fool, Nellie; given to take things hardly, to make a mountain out of every mole-hill of worry. You were right as to my being overworked, and I suppose I must take a holiday soon. I've been worrying a great deal lately, as you know —it has been about a case, dear."

"Tell me about it; to talk over the trouble will be a relief to us both."

"Yes, yes, it will. I'll tell you all about it, though, of course, there's no need to mention the man's name. The long and short of it is that I've made a bad blunder in diagnosis—a most unusual thing with me, little Nell, for I'm rather strong in that direction. A patient came to me some time ago with what I now believe to be an aneurism, or swelling of a great blood-vessel; a dangerous, probably incurable, trouble. I failed to perceive this, assumed him to be suffering only from general debility, and so the mischief has been allowed to grow unchecked. My error is likely to cost the man his life, do you see?"

"I am listening, Terence."

"This blunder will be a slur upon my professional skill; it may cost me ever so many patients, may go far towards ruining my practice and reducing us to downright poverty. You don't seem to appreciate how serious are the probable consequences of this slip of mine?"

"I'm listening to all you say."

"I do wish you'd be more sympathetic, Nell. You don't understand how painful to a man of any ability the discovery of such a blunder must be! And my enemies are certain to make the most of it. I say it may cost me my practice, and I can't face the thought of plunging a beloved wife into poverty without pain and horror. Surely you must see that 'tis yourself I'm so anxious about?"

Terence was now seated beside his wife, looking uneasily at her downcast face. There was something vexations, if not alarming, about her wooden reception of this explanation. He was telling the literal truth—or, at least, but a slightly modified version of it—and his manner of narration was so consummately natural as almost to impose upon himself. He had almost persuaded himself into the belief that the aneurism was really his central trouble just now,

How could she fail to be properly impressed by his plain statement?

"Have you nothing to say, Nell?" His tone was that of a man somewhat hurt, but too considerate of her to make any complaint.

If Nell had anything to say she was unable to get the words out. She wanted to put several questions; to ask, "Who are your enemies? How could a mere error in judgment like that cause in you the terror and despair which I noticed but a few minutes ago?"

But she was sick at heart, and in need of all her powers for the difficult task of self-persuasion. She had to believe what he said, was resolutely setting her mind to do so; but to accomplish this task it was first needful to crush a powerful sceptical instinct. Terence's face wore the deprecating, feminine kind of smile that she had learned to associate with tarradiddles, small or great.

Her looks remaining troubled, her eyes declining to meet his, Terence's smile faded. He took her hand and kissed it with mournful tenderness. She evidently misunderstood him, his manner seemed to say, but nothing could ever abate his chivalrous affection for her.

Nell was miserable at her inability to respond to his caress, and yearned the more to be convinced.

"What steps do you now intend to take?" she asked, timidly.

"I'm going to see Jack Syme about it now, tell him my views, and send him to see the man to-morrow. Jack has seen him once already, and fallen into the same mistake as myself; but there are fresh symptoms now, and I have little doubt but that he will agree with my present view of the case."

"But—but why not go yourself, Terence?"

"It is especially necessary not to alarm or excite the patient, and I think that danger will be lessened if I only send my assistant. I shall afterwards confer with Jack, and the patient will be treated entirely under my direction."

Terence had now really made up his mind to impart his views to his assistant, and set him to work to minutely examine Ezekiel. He was greatly relieved at the thought of thus shifting the responsibility over to Jack's shoulders; for now, were Ezekiel in course of time to die of this aneurism, surely he, Terence, need feel no qualm of conscience in the matter? Furthermore, it was a comfort to have told a considerable portion of the truth to Nell. True, she seemed thoughtful and perturbed at present, but women are odd creatures; very likely she would be quite herself again before they could reach the house.

"Take my arm, Nellie," he concluded, cheerfully, "and let us go up the garden together. I'm anxious to see Jack Syme, and get the business out of hand."

Nell made a strong effort to put aside her doubts entirely, and put but one question to him as they strolled up the steep gravel path. "How does a man make enemies, Terence?"

"Nothing easier, dear, for a man who's a doctor. Every patient is a potential enemy. You cure him, and all's well; you fail to do so as quickly as he thinks his due, and he grumbles; you fail altogether, and he hates you. Then he calls in another doctor, and Nature perhaps rights him of her own accord, while the other doctor gets the credit—and your carelessness and stupidity become that patient's nearest and dearest grievance. Then you send in your bill, and the breach is complete."

"Certainly people are more unjust and ungrateful than I imagined."

"Worse in every way than you imagined, little one. Men don't think of justice; but only of getting their money's worth. As for gratitude, why, 'tis a pretty thing to read of in books."

Nell sighed, but made no effort to combat these views. But if Terence was thus laying down the law in a superior manner, as becomes a man, she was meanwhile influencing him for good, as becomes a woman. Save for the fear of displeasing her, it is probable that his present good resolution would have gone the way of most of his others, passing gently through procrastination to oblivion. Not that Nell urged him by a single word to go straight to Jack Syme, but he knew she expected this, and he left her the moment they entered the house.

Finding his assistant in the surgery, he opened the question at once, explained that he had lately seen a good deal of Ezekiel, and from one thing and another had been led to suspect the existence of an aortic aneurism.

Jack listened, shrugging his shoulders. He totally disbelieved in any ailment of Ezekiel's other than hysteria.

"The man's a hysterical fool," he exclaimed, as he had done many times before; the truth being that Jack was in some respects a fool himself, though of quite a different order. He had no imagination, and a morbid, sensitive, intense man like poor Doidge was necessarily a closed book to him. Moreover, he had always looked upon Terence as too subtle and fanciful in his diagnoses, though capable often of making phenomenally good shots under difficult circumstances.

Later in the day, however, Syme found the miller in a tolerably favorable mood, and in obedience to orders carried out the desired physical examination with such skill as he possessed.

"Have you seen Doidge?" asked Terence, when his assistant returned.

"Oh yes, I've seen him, and gone through all the usual hocus-pocus; and I believe your aneurism to be a mare's-nest."

"Well, after all, perhaps you're right," said Terence.

CHAPTER XXXII

When the summer and early autumn had passed; when cricket was over and the crops had been gathered in; when the weary British subaltern, exhausted by cricket, tennis, C. O.'s parades, whist, billiards, and other such labors incident to the military career, was beginning to think of rest and peace in the bosom of his family; in a word, towards the end of October, the return of Captain Julius Rush, of the 20th Dragoon Guards, was being eagerly looked for at Bickington Park.

The old squire was to have his son with him for two whole months this time, and was somewhat unhinged by the contemplation of such a prospect. Sleep became a thing of difficulty for him; and, once the great day was fixed, time appeared to come to a stand-still. His mind began to run upon railway accidents; the condition of a certain railway bridge about forty miles on the London side of Chillington, about which some doubtful rumors were afloat, became a matter for searching inquiry. But, though some days of nervous agitation had gone far towards making the happy climax seem impossible, the down express did actually land Captain Julius, quite unharmed, upon the Chillington platform at the appointed hour. Whereupon Squire Rush seized upon his son, feeling younger by ten years than he had done an hour before, and enjoyed a most luxurious drive, with the young summer-tide in his heart contradicting any gloomy impressions made by the fading autumn woods around him.

"Dear lad!" he exclaimed, "I'm no better than an old woman about you. Do you know— But I really can't confess to such folly."

But, encouraged by the captain's smile, he did confess.

"Do you know that I've been so fidgety about the rumored rottenness of that bridge that I had serious thoughts of offering to repair it at my own expense?"

Julius laughed so that the mare shied and swerved.

"It's a fact, dear lad; I did actually contemplate such a thing!"

The squire laughed as heartily as his son, and they went on chattering nonsense for some time like any brace of school-boys.

"Ah!" said the old man, as they presently drove through the lodge gates, "if you would but take a wife and retire, and come to live with me at Bickington, I should have nothing left to wish for."

"What wife would welcome me home as you have done, my dear dad? Why, with my surly temper I should quarrel finally with any woman before the honey-moon was half over. No matrimony for me, thank you; I don't want to be under the thumb of any mortal thing in petticoats. I've seen too many good fellows mangled by that same toothed-trap, matrimony, to care about putting my own foot into it."

"Well, I'm glad Miss Kate can't hear him," muttered the squire, with a sigh. "He's just as stiff-necked as ever, I fear."

Julius found sweet peace reigning at the park, and the master of the house a changed person. Mr. Rush's nerve power was fairly well restored; he was capable now of speaking quite boldly to his servants—that is, in courageous moments. There was laxity in the house, no doubt, but the atmosphere of the place was now kindly and genial; with an undercurrent of sympathy between master and men such as Julius was pleased to note. He had come down fully prepared to make a second earthquake in the establishment, but perceived before he had been an hour in the house that neither speech nor action would be called for this time. The bold surgery of his last visit had wrought a complete cure; the general tone of Bickington Park was now that of one of Cuyp's pastorals.

Although he hardly knew one flower from another, it was Julius Rush's first duty on the occasion of every home-coming to make a tour of the conservatories with the squire on his arm, listening to such local news as the latter had to pour forth. The rite was duly performed to-day soon after his arrival, and much home-talk safely got through during the process.

There was a good deal of local gossip to be dealt with this time. The old squire rambled from topic to topic with the ardor of one who catches a sympathetic listener but once a year and makes the most of him when caught; but his talk to-day had a knack of coming round, after a multitude of side excursions, into one main channel.

In truth, the whole district was now wagging its tongue, not about Simon Secretan, whose final departure from the country had seemed a fitting close to his marred career, but about his more interesting successor; and Mr. Rush was hardly original enough to avoid being carried along in so powerful a stream. This central figure, upon

whom all eyes seemed to be focused, was not that of a special favorite of Captain Rush's, although he could not help admitting that the man's story was curious and picturesque in its way. Only the other day this popular hero had been a penniless searcher after a small medical practice; now he was a master—at least, during his wife's lifetime—of a fine old hall, and had the spending of an enormous income. For to such an elevation had Terence Clancy risen—the Terence whom we saw but a few months since on the brink of a miserable confession to his wife.

The breeze of fortune which landed Terence upon this pinnacle of prosperity sent a thrill of excitement, rather than surprise, through the neighborhood. Mrs. French-Chichester had long since given up her own hopes in favor of Nell and Terence; and other shrewd eyes had seen this climax looming in the distance for some time. Even dull ones, judging by the after-asseverations of their owners, must have had occasional glimpses of it. At any rate, there was little astonishment openly expressed, though a perfect buzz of romantic interest and speculation arose from Chillington and went eddying through half the county.

When, towards the end of a wet, depressing hay-harvest, the news of Sir Hamo Secretan's death got spread abroad, a few days of delightful curiosity supervened; but the period of pleasant suspense was brief. The general drift of the will, made and executed but a few days before the baronet's death, soon became known.

Sir Hamo might be said to cease to live, rather than to die, so placid and serene was his final departure. And during those last few peaceful days of his life there did arise in the old man's breast a certain yearning after his son Simon, who had disgraced him, had gone away out of the country, no one knew whither, had caused him bitter disappointment and pain; but who in old days, despite his tiresome whims and fancies, had certainly loved his father.

Troubled by this vague longing, and perhaps with some remembrance of neglect on his own part, Sir Hamo did begin to speak of his son to Nell and Terence Clancy. The latter, pricked by remorse—which was often sharp with him, though seldom long-lived—now earnestly desired to establish Simon's innocence in his father's eyes before it should be too late; but his lips were sealed by his own previous assertions to Nell. It was impossible to go back upon those former statements now; he had proposed to himself to become gradually converted to Simon's innocence, but there was no time for such a process. It was bad to be a liar in his own eyes, absolutely

impossible to be one in hers. He had to keep lying on to the end, and was miserable enough under the task.

On the morning of his death Sir Hamo, for the first time, put the downright question, "Do you think my son ever did that thing of which he was publicly accused, or was it only insane pride that kept him silent?"

Even now, at the eleventh hour, if only Nell had been absent, Terence might have wrought himself up to the point of freeing Simon from the charge; but Sir Hamo would scarcely let her out of his sight. The question was put in her presence, and with a pang of bitter self-loathing, Terence told the culminating lie of his life—the lie that had existed in his mind potentially ever since the treacherous thought of putting his own guilt upon Simon was first bred out of the fear of discovery.

He tried to console himself afterwards with the reflection that the admission would have come too late to affect the question of Simon's inheritance; but the consolation was inadequate, for, for aught he knew to the contrary, Sir Hamo might have altered his will at once; nor did the final scene take place for some hours afterwards. It was not until late in the afternoon that Sir Hamo, reclining in his invalid chair upon the terrace, sent a last feeble gaze over the beloved woods of Hollacomb, where his heart still lingered, and sank with a quiet sigh into his last sleep.

Very soon the discovery that his wife had inherited the bulk of Sir Hamo's property, and was actually standing in Simon's shoes, came upon Terence with a shock that half stunned him. At first he was only stupefied with astonishment, then remorseful and ecstatically happy by turns. He had never imagined that Sir Hamo would thus put his son entirely aside, and his remorse at the unlooked-for catastrophe was poignant. On the other hand, he had never imagined that he should one day, without a single conscious effort to that end, find himself the wielder of a vast income.

But the wondrous intoxication of possession soon ousted all other feelings. He was almost beside himself—ceased for a time to believe in his own identity. The glamour of wealth and power worked in his veins like an elixir. In old days his highest flights of fancy had never touched the mountain peak upon which he now actually stood. He seemed to have been transported to paradise, while the clang of the gates behind him rang the knell of all past trouble and pain and harassment.

As he grew cooler, sophistical arguments came thick and fast at

his bidding; a brief for his defence was built up with a facility surprising even to himself. He had never stirred a finger to bring about Simon's disinheritance, had never conceived the thing possible. Simon had done it himself. Years of proud aloofness, of obstinate silence when soft speech was needed, of frequent irritation of his father's prejudices, had made this result inevitable. The public indictment of Simon was but an incident in the long quarrel of a lifetime. Nor was Simon left destitute, or even poor, in his exile; his property of Hollacomb would always bring him in a good income. Again, if it were possible, he, Terence, would be relieved to let Nell hand over to Simon a handsome proportion of what he might have looked upon as his due; but it soon became apparent that nothing of the sort could be done. It was found that Nell could not touch the bulk of the property during her lifetime; and should she desire to ease her mind by devising it to Simon at her death, Terence would never dream of dissuading her.

With these and countless other arguments did Terence crowd the imaginary foolscap of his brief; then, having demolished in the process every possible counterclaim that his conscience might elaborate, he mentally revised the whole and put it aside for the present, while he plunged anew into the surge of happiness which Fate had rolled to his feet.

Upon this topic of the new prince of Monks Damerel, his social successes, his lavish generosity, his phenomenal popularity, Squire Rush was still expatiating when he and Julius sat down to luncheon. Indeed, the dragoon had already heard so much about the hero of the hour that, "not to die a listener," he compromised the question by agreeing to drive his father over to Chillington in the course of the afternoon, and hear Terence Clancy speak for himself. For the affairs of the cricket season were to be wound up at a general meeting of the club at three o'clock, when its new captain-president, Squire Clancy, as the principal speaker and great star of the occasion, could be studied in all his new glory.

Satisfied with this compromise, Mr. Rush was soon inditing of a more interesting matter—that is, his improved relations with Miss Tredethlyn. The friendly feeling between her and himself had maintained itself during the summer; had even increased a little, though of his ancient fear there still lingered enough to make the road to Moor Gates a somewhat steep one. In fact, it usually took the old squire, though he made no confession to that effect, from ten days to a fortnight to screw himself up to the point of achieving

a call upon the Tredethlyns. It appeared that he owed Mr. Tredethlyn a call now, and, with his son's support, would like to pay it soon. Would Julius come with him in a day or two?

An absence of some months, however, had not softened the stubborn Julius. He listened calmly, asked no questions, committed himself to nothing, whereat the squire's disappointment was sufficiently patent. His long-cherished desire to have his grandchildren playing about his knee seemed as far as ever from fulfilment; for he was well assured that Julius, if he did not marry Kate, would inevitably die a bachelor. Yet Mr. Rush had not by any means fired his last shot. Under pressure of failure this simple old man was growing cunning.

"You've heard nothing of Captain Saunderson and his wife, I suppose?" he presently asked, in a casual voice.

"No—nothing at all."

"I verily believe," the squire continued, with an innocent-sounding laugh, "that were the humbly-born aunt living in our neighborhood, the homelier presence would solace your pride even to the point of making you civil to Miss Kate. Mrs. Saunderson's 'commonness' and 'vulgarity,' which I heard so much about at the vicarage that afternoon, would be a constant balm to your mightiness. Wouldn't they, now?"

Julius was taken aback by this shrewd probing of his weakness. He said nothing—would not permit himself to smile—but there was a gleam in his eye that the simple, cunning father noted and treasured up. And so acute a schemer was his son's frowardness making of the old gentleman that he said not a word more at present, but changed the subject with a certain triumphant subtlety.

When, at the hour appointed for the cricket meeting, they drew up before the entrance of the old town-hall, Julius was able to realize by ocular evidence what a good deal of talk had put before him in but a hazy fashion—to wit, the remarkable pitch of popularity to which Terence Clancy had attained.

Under the arches of the hall and about the gravel space which lay between the ancient building and the road a large crowd was gathered; and when a smart tandem-cart came flashing over the town bridge, there arose a murmur that presently swelled into a downright cheer. The young prince received an ovation and evidently revelled in it.

In truth, popularity was as the breath of life to Terence Clancy. He possessed the natural kindliness which seeks public approval, and

was free from the arrogance that withers it. Moreover, his character, at least in regard to the qualities which make for heart-winning, was of a kind to bloom and expand under the sun of prosperity. His simple vanity took no harm from a little kindly applause. As they cheered him now his delicate skin flushed like a rose, his eyes sparkled with pleasure, his smile was bright and happy as summer waves sun-smitten. Old men upon whom that smile fell thought of their boyhood; young men who caught it hoped their sweethearts might be looking another way.

"There, now—did I exaggerate?" cried Mr. Rush, triumphantly. "You see for yourself how he takes hold of people and charms them. Isn't he a brilliant, handsome, dashing young fellow, now?"

But Julius vouchsafed his father nothing but a sardonic murmur. It vexed him to find this usurper of Simon's throne wielding the sceptre with such triumphant success. How much did the man really care for the public which revered him in this fulsome way? When had Simon, who for years had lavished heart and money upon this people, ever been cheered in the public street? Who missed him now, or cared whether he were alive or dead? In short, the soldier's naturally gloomy view of human nature was heightened by this incident; and, as a man who had always succeeded better in winning respect than love, he was perhaps somewhat jealous on his own account as well as Simon's. He certainly entered the hall and took a seat beside his father with a growing resentment against the general enthusiasm of the gathering.

Some one in the gallery watched Captain Rush's passage across the room, and, noting the dark mood of his countenance, felt depressed and disappointed. She was conscious of being perfectly dressed and of looking really handsome; for Mrs. French-Chichester —whose old friendship for Terence had lately returned in full force, and who never let slip a chance of being agreeable to Nell and Kate nowadays—had paid her one or two charming compliments. But of what avail to be admittedly worth looking at when people won't throw a glance your way, or give you a chance of bowing to them?

However, Kate had a sharp pair of eyes at her side, and could not afford to parade her mortification. She would not even permit herself the solace of cynical remarks in general, but talked so charitably of various people in the throng below that Mrs. French-Chichester secretly voted her a bore, and suppressed her yawns with difficulty.

Mr. Tredethlyn, as chairman of the meeting, presently opened the

proceedings with his old, pleasant, genial commonplaces, while Kate, listening to her father with an enthusiasm somewhat abated by habit, was irresistibly reminded of that stormy first assembly of the club, when Simon was so bitterly outraged. From which it appears that Julius Rush was not the only person whose thoughts wandered away regretfully to the exile.

After the chairman's opening speech, two or three of the most determined bores in the place addressed the hall in succession, depressing the spirits of the assembly with much success. Indeed, five-and-twenty minutes of such eloquence seemed to charge the very atmosphere of the room with droning stock phrases, such as "continued prosperity," "creditable exhibition of cricketing talent," and the like.

Mrs. French-Chichester, after muttering "I didn't know this was to be a prayer-meeting," fell into a gentle doze at this stage of the proceedings, leaving Kate free at least to direct her eyes whither she pleased.

When the sufferings of the assembly, however, had reached to about the furthest limit of human endurance, the last of those honest citizens, whose vanity so unfortunately flew to the tongue, showed signs of exhaustion, and proceeded to wind up his speech by a eulogium upon the most active, most popular, most enterprising member of the club — to wit, its captain-president, Mr. Terence Clancy of Monks Damerel Hall.

Whereupon the audience awoke suddenly, as though under a sprinkle of fresh water, and a cheery rapping of sticks began. The eulogy took a little time to get bodied forth, and contained long words enough to make a plain man dizzy; but at length they flailed it to death with gladsome "Hear hears!" and so won the breathing space long craved.

They were in a mood now for something bright and jestful—and they got it.

Terence was in splendid trim, and so bubbled with wit and drollery that the room was soon full of volleying laughter, which renewed itself almost with his every sentence.

Out of the considerable throng of profiles that came within Kate's field of vision, all save one were twitching and wrinkling with spasms of mirth; that one looked indifferent, if not critical, and presently took an expression even less in key with the general feeling of the audience.

The speaker had been describing with much point and sly humor

how the great bowler, Dick Yelverton, had missed an easy catch, and in doing so had received the cricket-ball full in his right eye, towards the end of the last match of the season; and he rounded off these remarks with a quotation not a bit too trite for his audience.

"Dick wasn't pretty to look at, if you remember," he said, with a sly chuckle, "and, faith, there's a beautiful halo of autumn tints round his eye yet. Look at him, you whose wickets he has scattered so often and so unkindly! Ah, but Dick's our prince of bowlers still, despite that wicked piece of leather; for what says the poet?—

"'You may break, you may shatter the vase, as you will,
But the scent of the roses will hang round it still.'"

Now, what could there be in this well-worn couplet, Kate asked herself, to impress Captain Rush so curiously?

At first Rush could not tell himself, but the words did startle him unaccountably. It was as though he had heard a sudden shout while walking in a desert place. Kate watched his face grow puzzled, then still more intent, then absent-looking, then completely mystified; lastly, full of vague darkness and suspicion. She knew that Captain Rush had never subscribed to the popular verdict in Terence's favor, had, indeed, always spoken of him with frank dislike; but Terence had spoken brightly and genially enough, without a hint of arrogance or self-importance. Surely there was not a word in his harangue even for an enemy to grow sullen about!

The captain's speech concluded the proceedings, and the crowd proceeded to jostle itself, in excellent spirits, down the steps and out onto the gravel; Terence himself driving off, flushed and radiant, with cheers and good wishes still ringing in his ears.

Upon descending from the gallery Kate was greeted by the man whose profile she had been studying with so much artistic interest, but who had not thrown a single glance her way during the proceedings. His manner was distant and formal, his words few; but he did speak, and did hand her into her pony-carriage. Perhaps he found it necessary to give himself this little treat as a reward for previous resolute conduct.

Yet, though his speech was calm enough, Kate thought Captain Rush must be putting some constraint upon himself. He looked uneasy and excited, and—though she made the admission to herself with some mortification—somewhat absent-minded.

She gathered up her reins and made a show of starting, but he

still remained in a conversational attitude; though, his stock of conventional remarks being apparently exhausted, he might have been expected to say good-bye with alacrity.

"I shall make the baldest remark I can possibly think of, then he'll be glad to get rid of me," muttered Kate. "What did you think of the speeches this afternoon, Captain Rush?"

"Oh, capital! Yes, the air is pleasantly cool, and you'll have a pleasant drive home. I beg your pardon," he added, apologetically, "but I didn't quite catch your question. Would you mind driving on a few yards out of the way of the people? I want to speak to you about the detective and his verdict."

"Pray tell me all about it," said Kate, anxiously, as soon as they had passed out of hearing of the crowd. Captain Rush was walking beside the pony-carriage, his face still wearing the look of puzzled disquiet which she had noticed some time since.

"Well, to tell the plain truth"—he smiled slightly as he made this confession—"the man was a complete failure."

"Ah! you should have taken my advice, and gone at once to Mr. Doidge."

"That is precisely what I did."

"Yes, yes. Had he no clew to give you?"

"The poor crazy fellow knows no more than we do, and will never make any discovery worth thinking about. He agreed to work away during my absence, but I don't for a moment suppose that he'll ever penetrate the mystery."

"Are you equally hopeless of success yourself? I do hope you won't give the thing up in despair?"

"I never give things up," he said, curtly.

"I'm glad to think there'll be one friend still working for poor old Simon. Are you still groping quite blindly? Is there no ray of light from any direction?"

"Nothing worth calling a ray, perhaps"—he paused some moments before giving this reply—"yet within the last twenty-four hours a kind of glimmer has come. I can't tell you more than that, and perhaps I'm mistaken in calling it even a glimmer. Suspicion is a reckless leaper, and mere personal prejudice may give it a fillip in any direction. Moreover, even supposing—what at present I have no right whatever to suppose—but the fact is, I'm in a state of bewilderment to-night, and maundering on in a way which can only puzzle and vex you—and the best thing I can do will be to say good-night at once."

Certainly Kate was not a little bewildered by his words and manner, while at the same time comforted at finding him willing to offer her such a modicum of attention as he had permitted himself. When she drove off into the darkness it was with a tingling consciousness that their hands had met for a moment, and that even a fraction of a second may contain something worth carrying away—and perhaps thinking about all the way home.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"How'd ye like to see me a member of Parliament, Nellie mavourneen?"

Nell smiled at her husband somewhat doubtfully, having learned to associate a relapse into his native brogue with some attempt or other to wheedle away her better judgment.

"I think you'd be a chameleon of a politician, Terence; a Liberal one day—"

"Deuce a bit, Nell!" he cut in with a deep twinkle in his eye, "for, odds weathercocks! (as Bob Acres might say) I'll be a hot Tory before this week's out, and keep so for the remainder of me natural life. I've contracted Toryism like a virulent disease, and, faith, I can't afford to take any curative medicine!"

"Why, only yesterday you told me you were a Liberal, Terence?"

"An' so I was, me dear, until 9 P.M. or thereabouts, but the Tory poison worked its way into me system after dinner last night. Bridistow and Pigott inoculated me, with Mrs. French-Chichester to help 'um, and I'm not likely to take a turn for the better this side of the Millennium—unless they happen to treat me to cold shoulder. I'll explain further, little girl, so keep your pretty ears open. Up till a month ago I was a Fenian, because, being free from any taint of political ambition, I could afford to think straight; then a woman tempted me — that is to say, Mrs. French-Chichester conceived for me the notion of a parliamentary career—and I fell away into Liberalism. Now, however, it seems that the Tory system of humbug is likely to land me in the House of Commons more readily than the other, so a Tory I am already, of the grand old full-bodied fruity sort; none stancher to be found in all broad England, none truer to our grand old institutions, our Church, our Sovereign, our caste prejudice, our innate stupidity, and the other time-honored and colossal things that go to make us English gentlemen what we are! Such noble sentiments have I imbibed, little Nell, in the course of but a few hours; or, to put it another way, such is the first hand dealt me, and which I'm bound to play, do you see?"

"Not in the least at present."

"Well, then, I'll compress the whole question into a nutshell for you. The Liberal member for this division of the county is an old crock, who will not stand again at the next general election; thus, when a certain penniless Irish adventurer became the other day a person of importance, the Liberals of this neighborhood began to view him as a possible successor to the ancient crock aforesaid. They made wary but definite advances to the adventurer-personage, and found him both intelligent and sympathetic, insomuch that he promised to develop into a thorough-going people's man in due time. So far, so good; but now for the cross-current which has drawn this open-hearted young fellow into another channel.

"Our Tory member is young, but a brainless fool—you see I take this last opportunity of speaking quite candidly before undertaking the yoke of a professional politician; do not fear that blunt and hardy truthfulness will ever distinguish (and condemn) me hereafter —I say, frankly, he's a brainless fool, and my countrymen in the House (more power to 'um!) smother him with ridicule before ever the foolish tongue can wag off a brace of sentences. Wherefore his good friends down here are sick of the long-eared representative, and live in hopes of getting him to resign long before the next general election. Now do you see how the land lies? The Irish adventurer has been playing off one party against the other, but will one day this week, in all probability, commit himself to the greater dullards, as being the more efficient props. As he only lives on his wife's charity, his exalted position needs an artificial buttress here and there, d'ye see? He can't afford to do without the wealthy bigwig, Sir Raby Pigott, his serene and intellectual highness, Lord Bridistow, and the other landed geniuses of the district. In fact, my dear Nell, the long and short of it is that, to-morrow being market-day, I am to meet Bridistow in the town about noon for further political discussion, and shall probably bring him here to lunch, finally yielding to his blandishments, after due modest assertion of my own unworthiness, about four o'clock in the afternoon."

"But, Terence, surely common honesty—"

"I don't care the flick of a whip for that, bless your simplicity. I tell you I'm going to be a leading man, to have my fling among these English fools — whom at bottom I hate with all my soul! I started life as a pauper, sprung from a long line of paupers ground down by English tyranny, and now, by the Lord, I'll have my fling! I've purchased popularity by a little blarney — bedad, you should have heard the fools cheer me at the cricket meeting yesterday! —

and now am going to purchase a high place by adding thereto your money, so ye'd best make up your mind to the situation, little woman."

It will be seen that prosperity had exhilarated Terence, and emphasized some of his qualities in a peculiar fashion. This audacious method of handling his wife was the one he commonly used now, for he found that by persistent self-confidence and assertion he could bluff her into almost anything. In truth, Terence had learned the secret of how to get his own way from no less able an instructress than Mrs. French-Chichester, who had been of great service to the young master of Monks Damerel lately, and had taken up the question of his parliamentary career with great enthusiasm; indeed, but for her, Terence might never have turned his thoughts to public life. She was ambitious for him, determined to make him a leading man in the county, and full of a hundred schemes for pushing him up to the highest rungs of the social ladder. Nor would she have asked a pleasanter task than the training and handling of so promising a candidate for popular favor. She it was who taught him the value of social trifles, the importance of ingratiating himself not only with the best people, but with all persons, high and low; who fed him full with the strong meat of worldly ambition, and saw that his moral consciousness should not be unduly worked upon by his wife. In truth, but for her support and wise counsel, it is probable that Nell would hardly have been brought so soon into her present condition of wholesome submission, for the sprightly widow had from the first laid herself out to preserve Terence from the ignominy of being henpecked. She would carry him off triumphantly from under Nell's very nose, and persuade him that his wife was flatly unsympathetic, undutifully cold in all matters relating to the only question worth thinking about—his future high career. She sneered Nell down as good-humoredly and as effectually as she had formerly done her cousin Simon; for if this active woman was romantically prone to bring likely young people together, she was not less skilled at gently drawing them asunder afterwards.

Having delivered himself of the above frank statement of his political views and intentions, Terence turned, whistling cheerfully, to look at a modern sea-piece placed upon an easel near which Nell was seated. She watched him furtively as he followed the lines of the composition with his finger and criticised, with muttered exclamations of satisfaction, the delicate opal tints of the sky horizon.

The general appearance of the room, lately Sir Hamo Secretan's

study, suggested that the new master of the Hall had already made a pretty fair beginning of the joyous pastime which he called "having his fling." The chamber was now a perfect gallery of modern French and English pictures, evidently chosen by one who had no taste for mediocrity; the new furniture was the richest obtainable; the table was covered with costly knick-knacks, while a goodly pile of unopened tradesmen's bills, the crop of a single post-delivery, occupied one corner. In truth, the quiet old Hall seemed not merely to have awakened from a long sleep, but to have been hailed upon by a goodly shower of gold. A bevy of smart London servants had replaced the innocent dove-cot of Mrs. Henley, who had retired to a fashionable watering-place with a view to setting up as a gentlewoman at large. Terence already possessed an excellent stud, and a little army of grooms and helpers; also a hundred-ton cutter at Lymport, and many other appurtenances necessary to a man of his wealth. It was not his policy to hide his light under a bushel, but rather to let it flare, bonfire-fashion, across the breadth of the county. Nor was he troubled with any paltry misgivings as to expense. Whenever his agent—the very man who had first caused the tin-mine to shed pure gold into Sir Hamo's pockets—waited upon the new squire, Terence would exclaim, with his genial laugh:

"Oh, damn the business, Treluddra—go to Mrs. Clancy about everything; the property's hers, and, faith, she must take the bother with it!"

"Do you see the curl of foam on this breaking wave, Nell?" he now said, after a pause. "It is done with one stroke of the palette-knife, but a lifetime of labor and study have gone to make that one stroke possible. Now the real art of life is to clutch the success without the labor. I'm going to do just such a perfect stroke to-morrow, and the only toil that has gone to produce it has been that of winning the sweetest wife in England. Ah, 'tis her presence that has kept all but landscapes and seascapes from these walls, for no painted head's worth looking at beside the 'ripe and real' beauty that I have always before me!"

Nell accepted this sweetmeat with a dutiful smile, suppressing the sigh that would have come more glibly. She was glad that he had rattled on without giving her much chance of replying, for her old influence over Terence had dwindled to the point where judicious silence has to take the place of conscientious objection.

We know how, on the last occasion of our seeing them together, she had resolutely set herself to accept her husband as he was; to

love and, if possible, respect him, limitations and all. To that course of conduct she had clung with stubborn fidelity, and none would ever know how much it cost her. The trial had begun at once, for the most earnest endeavor to accept his explanation had proved futile. It was plain to her, as soon as coolness returned, that he had some dark secret on his mind, that he had glided from the very brink of confession by one of those slippery turns which seemed to come to him so easily. Well, she would never pry into that, never allude to it again; and certainly the trouble, whatever it might be, had been driven clean out of his mind when the rise of fortune came, unless his constant desire for fresh excitement be interpreted as— But no; Nell would have nothing to do with interpretations and surmises. Perhaps she felt that the less she knew the better her chance of happiness.

Howbeit, from that time Terence had begun as it were to slip from her grasp. He openly resented her scruples as to stepping into Simon's shoes, and could never endure even to have Simon's name mentioned. He plunged into all social dissipations that lay open to him with a kind of feverish energy, and threw money about in a lavish way which frightened his quiet-going wife; nor did he seem to care much about pleasing her or retaining her respect, sustained as he now was by the intoxicating applause of a large neighborhood. But still Nell persisted in making every allowance for him, in manufacturing excuses for every fresh whim and vagary of her husband. In truth, she was like a friendly woman-critic standing before the canvas of one who is dear to her, striving to find here and there a brush-mark of genius in a broad spread of flat mediocrity.

"Well, good-bye, little woman," said Terence, at length, when his wife had remained silent for some minutes; "apparently I'm not destined to elicit any sympathy from you, so I may as well be off. You can't enter into a man's ambition at all, I suppose. Sorry I can't fall in with your views either, which I presume would tend to the parcelling out of the property into cabbage-gardens for the poor, or building-sites for almshouses. Sorry I can't ride a beastly tricycle instead of a thorough-bred horse, or drive you to market of a Thursday in a donkey-cart. Sorry I'm not a goody-goody country curate, with a taste for distributing flannels and fawning on old women. However, I've a notion that 'twould be all the same. Were I the Angel Gabriel, you'd be only half satisfied with me; certainly nothing composed of mere flesh and blood can ever pretend to come up to your standard."

"You insult me—you insult me!" cried Nell, with quivering lips.

It was the first time Nell had ever "flown out" at him, as the homely phrase has it; and the man's natural kindliness was at once awakened.

"There, there, little girl. I know my tone was abominable, and my words nearly as bad. Forgive me, Nellie!"

"Oh, Terence, I never shall be happy in this miserable place. I feel that it doesn't rightly belong to me, that we are flinging away money which is not our own. Our position seems to me altogether false and hollow, and honesty seems to have become an impossibility. Why must we always be scheming to better ourselves, and straining after fresh social successes? Why must you go against your conscience and pretend to hold political views which you really hate? How much happiness do we get from all this false striving? I wish —ah, how I wish!—we were back in our old life, honestly trying to make both ends meet, and to save a little, and caring for nothing beyond!"

"What mawkish nonsense!" cried Terence, impatiently. "Was ever a man so worried and bothered just for trying to do his best and get on in the world? I let you take your own course, and mope at home when we ought to be furthering my chances in society. I never harass you or put the least pressure on you—and yet you're never contented for an hour."

"Because I don't feel *honest*, Terence; and the more I think of our position the less satisfied I feel about it. I can't see that we have any right to be standing in Simon's shoes—"

"Look here, Nell," he interposed, angrily; "I wish you'd understand once for all that I will not hear a word more about that man. You drive me half crazy with continual harping on that string. You've taught me to hate the man so that I wish he were dead! How could I prevent his disinheritance? How could I reconcile him with his father, when they had been pulling two ways all their lives? I have enough to bear in the knowledge that you respect and revere the man as you've never respected me, without having the loss of his property thrust in my face like this!"

"Yes, I do respect him," said Nell, firmly; "for it has come to me—I know not how—that he was never guilty of that wickedness. It was not in Simon's nature to do such a thing, and I ought never to have believed in his guilt."

"What do you mean?" cried Terence, who was now white with anger.

"Just what I say—that Simon had nothing to do with poor Mary's trouble."

"What are you driving at? Whom do you suspect?"

"Why are you so fierce and strange, Terence? I suspect no one. I only long for the real culprit to be found and the innocent man righted. Ah, if I only had it in my power to punish the man who has ruined poor Simon—"

"You wouldn't spare him, I suppose?"

"After what he has done for Simon, I should be merciless towards him!"

"God help him, if you do catch him! He had better have drowned himself at once than have injured your hero!"

"Well, well," said Nell, with a heavy sigh, "I ought not to have introduced a subject that pains you so much, Terence. I know I have done wrong, but you sha'n't be troubled about this any more. Tell me further about your political views, for I am sure you were joking with me in pretending to be so hypocritical?"

"I've neither views, nor hope, nor ambition," he muttered. "I'm a poor, miserable devil, always straining after happiness and never reaching it! I wish, with you, that we had never left our old life—or rather that we had gone abroad, and started a new one, and left this cursed country forever!"

Accustomed though she was to Terence's sudden changes of mood, Nell was amazed at this one. He had plunged from hot wrath into flat depression with a speed which almost took her breath away.

"I have vexed and worried you, dear," she said, penitently. "And I do believe my views are very narrow and peculiar. Nor have I any right to expect you to think with me in everything. Let us talk of something happy and pleasant now, such as our plans for next summer. Are you really going to take me for that yachting cruise to Scotland?"

But Terence's fit of despondency was not to be shaken off so easily.

"Life's a poor thing, Nell," he groaned, "brimful of shams and frauds and irony. And our insane pursuit of happiness is the most pitiful thing under the sun. Can you name a single living soul who is happy?

"'Happy thou art not:
For what thou hast not still thou striv'st to get,
And what thou hast forgett'st.'

Do you know that speech of the duke's in "Measure for Measure?" I know every line of it, and every line's as true as it is pathetic.

> "'If thou art rich, thou art poor;
> For, like an ass whose back with ingots bows,
> Thou bear'st thy heavy riches but a journey,
> And death unloads thee. Friend hast thou none.'

Most true, Nell—most true! Friend I have none. They call me the most popular man in the county; but there's not a living soul that cares for me but you—and even you would fall off if you knew me through and through. I wonder, could any man afford to be known through and through? If there be such a man, I'll admit that he's happy. I'd rather be like such a one than be a crowned king, though maybe the possession of an absolutely clear conscience would be a happiness insupportable by a poor devil like me! Man's nothing but a doomed creature, struggling over ground honeycombed with pitfalls, into one or other of which he *must* fall sooner or later; then the devil throws a net over him, and he never fronts the clear sky more. Look, Nell — look where I'm pointing! Do you see how the sunlight falls on that field by the edge of the wood yonder? and do you see that stooping figure on the grass? That's the figure of a man, and he's snaring larks. He has a net set upright and the cord in his hand, and grain spread close to the net. Watch him now! See, he jerks the cord, and the net falls, and the hulking brute darts forward, doubtless to clutch the little fluttering victim. Next he'll put it into a cage, six inches by four, to yearn away its life henceforth in some dismal alley. It will never more feel the glorious sweep of the spring breeze, nor the warm kiss of the June sunshine, but just long and pine and yearn away its heart till it breaks. Now, a man, once entrapped in one of those pitfalls I mentioned, is no better than a caged lark, with no more hope of liberty, no more chance of escape. Do ye think I exaggerate? Ah, Nellie mavourneen, ye don't know what a hell of suffering comes with a sick conscience! Listen, now! I'd like to slash off three years of me life with a single knife-stroke; then I'd like to meet ye again, a free girl, who had never looked twice at another man, to woo and wed ye fair and straight, and carry ye off to some lonely home in the depths of some far-off country, where are no pitfalls for erring men, and there let ye train me up, and dower me with some of your own goodness, and teach me how to live with a conscience pure and crystal clear as your own! Ah, Nell, Nell, if I could only

start fair again — start fair and straight from the beginning, with you to help me—I might win something better than the sham happiness that's me lot now!"

He ended with a sob and a broken exclamation, and Nell could only weep with him and pray for him and try in vain to comfort him.

CHAPTER XXXIV

The puzzled frame of mind into which the meeting at the town-hall had thrown Captain Rush remained with him throughout the night; and the next morning, about the hour when the scene described in the last chapter was enacting, he found himself walking into Chillington, still engaged in argument, analysis, speculation, and such-like mental exercises. He was naturally a man of action rather than of thought; but now, for once in a way, had arrived at the point of being unable to decide upon what course to take at a given juncture.

How to verify, or else to clear his mind of, a vague suspicion which at present seemed merely to be floating in his senses, and unable to find a definite anchorage; which, in fact, was rather a quickening of speculation in a given direction than a formulated suspicion. That was the main condition of the problem still demanding a solution. At present he had but a gossamer thread of evidence to go upon; and, as a fair-minded man, conscious of a strong bias against the suspected person, he feared to be precipitate. On the other hand, he could not be easy in his mind without making some effort towards obtaining the needed verification.

Julius Rush was long upon the road this morning; yet, by the time he reached the town, his spell of solitary thinking did not appear to have had the desired issue. He strolled on to the town bridge with the aspect of a man who had still failed to make up his mind upon some knotty question. After a brief halt on the bridge, however, he bent his steps up-stream, muttering: "Yes, I'll see Doidge again; there'll be no harm done if I'm reasonably cautious."

He went by the road that Terence had followed with so much fear and hesitation on a former occasion; and upon reaching the mill-yard was struck, as Terence had been, with its busy and prosperous aspect. But Rush made no pause for a gossip with the foreman; he promptly strode up to the door, looking neither to right nor left, and knocked vigorously.

When Julius was shown into the parlor, the appearance of poor Doidge, the owner of this flourishing business, was certainly not cal-

culated to cheer a man endowed with some of the melancholy of his period. The miller lay upon a sofa, looking worn and haggard, and altogether changed for the worse since Julius Rush's last visit. The glance which used to wander so proudly from this window over the broad meadows had lost its fire and arrogance. When he spoke his greetings, the voice that had laid down the law to all Chillington, had made clerks and foremen and tenants tremble in their shoes, was now languid and toneless; but perhaps the most pathetic thing of all about the man was his meekness.

His visitor was really shocked at finding Ezekiel's natural self-importance thus watered down by sickness, and the more so when he noted the hollow cheek and other physical symptoms of decay. But, as a member of the superior sex, Captain Rush's sympathies were, as a matter of course, kept under good control. He quickly proceeded to business.

"Any news, Mr. Doidge? You agreed to work away in my absence, but I fear bad health must have tied you down a good deal."

Doidge smiled strangely.

"Not altogether, mister."

"What! have you chanced upon any clew?"

"Not exactly *chanced* neither. Happen I've labored and delved my way to somethin' o' the sort."

"What is it? Out with your clew if you have one!"

"Don't you be startin' off that way, captain, or you'll be smashin' a shaft presently. Hows'ever, I'll tell you this much—that I shall yet lay my hands on *he* before I'm carried out of this mill feet first. But now, let us have your news, for your eye tells me you've got some."

"No, I've nothing much to say; in fact, my suspicions, such as they are, seem too vague to be worth mentioning at present."

Doidge's wan smile broke out again.

"Still afeared of my violence?" he muttered.

"No, for I'm perfectly capable of restraining that. What I *do* fear is the possible wronging of an innocent man, because I happen to dislike him heartily, and the giving of deep pain and mortification to several other people besides—"

"To some of your own friends, in fact?" asked the other, with a sudden penetrating glance.

"I never said so!" retorted Julius, angrily; "and I'll trouble you not to jump at unauthorized conclusions. Surely you must understand that I don't care to raise a confounded scandal with nothing but a piece of random guesswork to hinge it upon?"

"I understand, sir," said the miller, dryly, adding under his breath, "Mayhap I understand rather more than you'm aware of, mister."

"May I have another look at that volume of poems from among your relics, Doidge?"

"Surely you may, sir. Maybe you'll lift the box—'tis yonder, in the lower drawer o' the cupboard—for yourself?"

Julius did so, and opened the box with a key which the miller now handed to him. Doidge watched him amusedly, rather than intently, as he rapidly turned the leaves from one marked passage to another.

"Ah!" The searcher's voice, when it presently broke the silence, was edged with the triumph he could not quite suppress.

> "You may break, you may shatter the vase, as you will,
> But the scent of the roses will hang round it still."

Julius read the couplet aloud, adding, hastily, "I have an idea, Doidge!—I'm bound to say I have an idea—but that's all at present. There's not evidence enough to hang a dog upon yet."

"Just so, captain—just so. And how are you goin' to work up your evidence?"

"I don't know; but in any case we must proceed very cautiously. If my leap in the dark should happen to be in the right direction, however, I can at least guess at a reason for Secretan's extraordinary silence."

"Can you, really now? Well, that's very clever! But lookee, sir, I won't play with you any longer. I respect your caution and your scruples and all that; but the truth is, there's no need for 'em—as you shall hear presently. You've got your eye on the probable culprit, it seems—or, at any rate, some one who's worth takin' partic'lar notice of. Well, I happen to know a party who can tell us at a glance whether 'tis our man or not. You won't tell me his name, I suppose?"

"I don't think it would be right at this stage of the proceedings."

"Then I'll humor you, sir. But, anyway, you can tell me whether he's high up or low down in the world?"

"He is in a good position."

"Just so; and consequently has a good way to fall."

"Don't make too sure of him, Doidge. Consider what irremediable mischief has come of your over-hasty suspicion in a former case."

"Don't you be alarmed, captain; and hearken now to my record of work during your absence. I've been takin' this ring o' Mary's up and down the line all through the summer; I've shown it to every jeweller in every town within fifty mile o' Chillington. I had been at the job best part o' three months, and was gettin' hopeless-like, when early this week I made one more cast down among the little shops in the heart o' the low-lying part of Lymport; and in a small street, where they mostly sell stinkin' fish and second-hand seamen's outfits, and which I had passed over before as not worth a visit, I found the man as sold this pearl ring to a gentleman just about the date when it must have been given to Mary."

"Is he certain about the ring? Could he swear to it?"

"It has got his own marks on it. He could swear to 't anywhere or anywhen."

"Does he remember the gentleman well? Did he take any special note of his appearance? Does he know his name?"

The self-contained soldier was now on fire with excitement. Doidge talked on with the assurance of a man with whom suspense is practically over.

"No; he knows nothing of the gentleman's name, but can swear to his appearance—noticed one or two points which he remembers perfectly."

"What are the points, man? You madden me with your slowness!"

"I'm not goin' to tell you; I may have reasons for caution as well as you. I'm not goin' to let my enemy slip by marching off on a false trail as I did once before. Tell me when and where to find him, and I'll manage to let my identifyin' witness clap eyes to him, and then we shall know where we are. He's a little beast of a Jew-shopman, my witness is, who, I reckon, would swear to anythin' for gain; but if he's thrown across the path of our gentleman accidental like, I shall know well enough whether the recognition be a true article or a make-up."

"We'll arrange a day as soon as possible; and if the recognition does come off, will you send to me at Bickington at once?"

"Yes, I'll send on the man himself, and you'll know him fast enough—a little dirty, hook-nosed villain, five-foot nothing high, with a gray beard hanging down to 's waist."

"Very well, I shall give orders that any one answering to that description be sent in to me at once. What do you think of a market-day for our experiment? Every one in the neighbor-

hood will be driving into town at one time or another on that day."

"Very good; to-morrow is market-day, and the sooner the trial comes off the better. I'll have my little Jew dawdlin' about the High Street and market-place all day to-morrow, from ten o'clock onward, and I'll be at his side all the while."

"And you might spend some of the time on the town bridge, for almost everybody who lives on the south side of the river will be driving over it in the course of the morning."

"You'm right, sir; and, what's more, one can lounge on the bridge all day without attractin' notice, with half the town for company. And you are goin' now, sir? Well, good-bye; and don't be afeard us 'll get the wrong man this time. I reckon us 'll either miss fire altogether—or kill!"

CHAPTER XXXV

Terence Clancy's spasm of remorse passed over for the time, as many others had done before now, and by Thursday morning he was once again his cheery, jubilant self. It was then his turn to console Nell, who had been a good deal unhinged by his fit of despair, and who had not his happy faculty of throwing off a wave of depression by mere outpouring of the heart to a sympathetic listener.

His political aspirations, too, were now once more in full working order, for Mrs. French-Chichester had dined at the Hall last night, and reinvested its master with some of her own ardor and spirit. Our Lady Bountiful, as it happened, always took especial pleasure in these quiet evenings at Monks Damerel; for Nell's ill-concealed jealousy of her influence over Terence was an unfailing source of enjoyment on the one hand; and on the other, the training and development of so apt a pupil as Nell's husband could not fail to be a relishing task.

On this occasion she took more than usual pains to impress upon Terence what a vista of fine possibilities was opening before him, and at the same time gave him precise instructions as to his attitude towards Lord Bridistow on the morrow. Nor was Nell left out in the cold in this matter of advice and encouragement. Mrs. French-Chichester decided that both Sir Raby Pigott and Lord Bridistow should be brought in to luncheon to-morrow, and gave their intended hostess many useful hints as to the proper reception of these powerful political backers of the future member.

Nell listened passively, and promised to do her best; but the visitor easily managed to give emphasis to her lukewarmness, and to further impress Terence with a sense that his interests would always be neglected by this unsympathetic wife of his.

Next morning things fell out very much as this shrewd prophetess had foretold. Lord Bridistow and Sir Raby met Terence at the Falcon according to appointment, and in due course were brought on to Monks Damerel. They were caught up just outside the lodge gates by Lady Bountiful, who also happened to be on her way to lunch with Mrs. Clancy.

At the luncheon-party which ensued Mrs. French-Chichester was naturally in her element, and in excellent trim for being great friends with Nell, while at the same time making her thoroughly ineffective. She kept the talk well in the groove of politics, upon which topic Nell had nothing whatever to say; and triumphantly monopolized the good-natured Lord Bridistow, who hardly got a chance of saying a word to his beautiful young hostess.

Meanwhile Sir Raby Pigott was pompously testing—with much skill and aplomb, as he imagined—the political soundness of young Clancy. He found Terence a charmingly modest young fellow, not too clever, evidently willing to be guided by older and wiser people, and with such a genuine Tory basis as would do credit to any English gentleman of the fine old school.

The widow enjoyed Terence's delicious hypocrisy to the full, vowing to herself that she had never appreciated him at his true worth until to-day. Nell bore up against it as best she could, accepting with quiet dignity her rôle as a nonentity, a woman whose duty consists of looking pretty and holding her tongue.

Terence and Mrs. French-Chichester were both really brilliant in their respective ways, insomuch that both haply regretted the mental poverty of their audience. No wonder, she reflected with a sigh, Terence was athirst for a larger world when here he had to pare down his wit in order to be understood at all.

After luncheon the gentlemen adjourned to the billiard-room, nominally with a view to a game; but the shrewd widow felt tolerably sure that the two guests intended to pocket something better than billiard-balls.

Being really excited and anxious, she was unable to sit still, and was glad to walk out onto the terrace with Nell. As they strolled up and down near the sundial, or leaned against the stone balustrade for a look at the terrace below and the green levels of the old formal garden, she amused herself by lecturing the young wife further upon the duties of her new station, and all the social procedure necessary for the securing of Terence's political position.

Nell listened meekly enough; being somewhat ashamed at her own want of enthusiasm, yet vaguely hoping that time would bring her to a better frame of mind. She was aware that the elder lady despised her as a spiritless sort of creature, but was not analytical enough to perceive that her chief failing in the eyes of this critic was something which even time and patience would not amend—her scrupulous honesty. In fact, Nell and her husband, and their

present adviser, lived on three separate ethical planes, the highest and lowest of which were too far apart for convenient intercourse. Nell, on the upper level, followed honesty as a guiding star; Mrs. French-Chichester pursued self-interest no less unswervingly, and would admit no other motive into her calculations; while Terence sympathized with both, and took a wavering course between them.

"I do wish we could put a little life into you, Nell; you're just as dull as this October day, or the old garden with its tiresome stiffness, its atmosphere of dead-and-gone hope, and church-yard quietude." Thus Nell's visitor wound up her lecture when some half-hour had passed without a sign from the men.

Yet the old garden, if sombre, looked quaint and interesting; and the weather was well enough for October, showing pearly gleams of light upon mellowing woods, and gauzy mists creeping up from the combe below.

At length, however, by the time Nell and her visitor were heartily tired of one another, the subtle scent of havanas stole upon the air of the terrace; the gentlemen were coming round the corner of the house.

In a moment Mrs. French-Chichester read victory in their faces, and composed herself to accept it with proper simplicity of aspect.

Lord Bridistow and Sir Raby were beaming with complaisant satisfaction. Terence wore a deprecating, modest expression; but the pose of his figure, the very planting of his feet, betrayed to one keen observer that he had just accepted a proffered honor, and that his brain was now aglow with triumph.

As soon as he caught sight of the ladies, Lord Bridistow came forward with the frank *bonhomie* of a school-boy to tell the story of the compact just completed, and forecast a brilliant career for their future member, Terence Clancy. Even pompous Sir Raby was talkative and excited.

Meanwhile Terence modestly detached himself from the group, and, resting upon the terrace balustrade, turned his face to the climbing oak woods across the combe, and, as the rich promise of the future gathered form and shape, allowed the smile of his heart to pass into his eyes. On his left was the old sundial, whose carved inscription had spoken to so many generations of the ancient Bampfylde family.

"*Scis horas, nescis horam*," muttered Terence, as he glanced towards it. "Ah, but I *do* know the hour. The hour has come. The tide of my affairs has already been taken at the flood."

His gaze wandered away again to the steep oak coppice and downward to where the tall ashes and alders, which marked the course of the hidden brook, were cut by the line of the garden wall. Presently the whole scene faded again, giving place to fancy pictures of nobler line and hue; then something recalled him to earth again suddenly. In the boundary wall below him there was a dainty little wrought-iron gate, arched with stone chevrons, and giving access to a woodland path which led past the stables to some cottages higher up the combe. It was the opening of this gate that arrested his attention.

It surprised Terence a little to see the gate opened at all, for the stable people were not allowed to pass that way. But his first surprise quickly gathered force, and was merged in a vague consternation, when a familiar figure, which he had never learned to face without a quickened pulse, came slowly through the narrow opening and halted, looking upward towards the terrace.

The figure supported itself for a few moments against one of the gate-piers, then advanced a few steps, then halted once more, as though unable to move more than a few yards at a time.

In this manner the intruder passed over a narrow strip of lawn and reached the broad gravel sweep leading up to the terrace steps. Terence watched him with a sickness of heart that deepened with each tottering effort which brought the man one step nearer.

"What has he come for? Why has he come in by the little gate?" he muttered, making a strenuous effort to brace up his will and think coherently.

Some corner of the questioner's mind answered promptly, "He has driven into the stable-yard and been told that you are on the terrace, and so has made his way hither by the shortest route. He has come to say that he has found you out. He is half-dead, by the look of him, but with life enough left in him to ruin yours. Doidge has you in his grasp at last, and will crush you to powder."

"*Scis horas, nescis horam.*" The old sundial seemed to be repeating the words in a mocking whisper.

The talk and laughter of the group close by were drifting to Terence's ears as though from a distance; compliments and congratulations were buzzing behind him, ruin slowly approaching him in front.

He still leaned heavily upon the balustrade, incapable of movement; but the power of clear thought was coming back to him, and, for the first time, a perfect realization of his situation was

shaping itself in his mind. He perceived that were his enemy in possession of the truth—and Ezekiel's face, now that he was drawing nearer, left hardly a vestige of doubt on this head—his social ruin was more absolute than he had ever yet imagined. He had driven Simon out of the country; he stood in Simon's shoes, in the full enjoyment of Simon's inheritance. Not a human soul would believe that he had drifted gradually into this position, without one thought of scheming his friend's downfall; that the stream of circumstance had carried him along, in spite of himself; that Fate had been too strong for him; that he had been always a weak drifter, but never a treacherous plotter—he must needs stand convicted in the eyes of all — worst of all, in Nell's eyes — as a most ignoble betrayer, not only of an innocent man, but of a friend and benefactor. He could not bear that—could not even begin to bear it; he could not stand upright for a moment under the storm of contumely that was about to burst over his head. The torture would kill him, unless, unless—

He turned his head for a moment, and cast one miserable glance backward.

Nell was looking towards him, flushed and happy, with affectionate pride in her eyes. She had been listening to his praises — was already explaining away what seemed like hypocrisy in him, by saying to herself, "That was but a pretence put on to try me. He does in reality think with these gentlemen, and will serve their interests loyally."

His wife's bright looks seemed to revive Terence's drooping courage for the moment.

"I'm a coward," he muttered—"a weak, cringing coward. What proof against me can he possibly have obtained?"

But once more that corner of the mind which had apparently taken charge of him, and was ordering him about like a master, answered his question without hesitation — "When you rode over the town bridge an hour or two back, your enemy was among the loungers who watched you pass. And who was standing beside Doidge? Some one you failed to recognize; but you stared at him—the short, hook-nosed man with the long beard—as though he were half familiar. Ah, it is dawning upon you—you recollect him well enough now. That was the man who sold you the pearl ring—your gift to Mary Pethick — the one Doidge kept among his relics. Don't cheat yourself by catching at straws — drown at once; down with your head, and have done with it. See, your study window's open; you have pluck enough to cheat your enemy yet. You have

but to cross this narrow strip of gravel, pass through the open window, and pull out a drawer—you know which—then let them rave their loudest, you'll never hear them!"

Ezekiel had by this time reached the steps giving access to the lower terrace, and again halted, clinging for support to a carved stone vase. His victim could read his face now, clear as print, and the tale might be summed up in the one word—"ruin."

Once more Terence turned his despairing eyes to the group on his left. The two men and Mrs. French-Chichester were gazing surprisedly at the approaching figure; but in Nell's face there was something greater than surprise. He saw, or thought he saw, a growing horror of expectation, as though his former half-confession had suddenly grown complete.

It was the last straw to poor, weak Terence; he could not face the coming torture. He thrust himself from the stone balustrade, and bent his wavering steps towards the study window. Nell took a step forward, as though with the intention of intercepting him, but got no farther than the sundial, against which she leaned, staring wildly at the intruder.

Upon seeing his enemy disappear from the terrace above, Ezekiel uttered a low, harsh cry, and began to drag himself up the last flight of steps. By the time he had reached the terrace level Terence was entering the open study window.

Doidge stood pointing after him, his face black with passion, his arm and body quivering.

The moment afterwards Terence saw the others close round him. Doidge's square figure was concealed behind the two tall gentlemen, and Terence seemed to hear the burning words wherewith his enemy was denouncing him. He stepped farther into the room and disappeared.

Yet not a word was spoken—not a syllable escaped Ezekiel's lips. His cry from the lower terrace was the last sound he was ever to utter. His soul, at the very moment of discharging its load of vengeance, was claimed by Him whose office it would have usurped. The body which he had dragged so painfully to within a hand-breadth of his goal sank, a lifeless, formless heap, upon the gravel terrace.

Even as they were bending over the dead Thing in awe and wonder, and Nell was kneeling pitifully beside it, with her hand straying towards the still heart, there was a loud report from the room behind them, and a wail from Nell proclaimed that the little drama had ended in a veritable tragedy.

CHAPTER XXXVI

"Is that you, Nell?"

"Yes. I am sitting here beside you."

A hard smile hovered in Terence's eyes as he turned them upon her, and his weak voice was full of bitterness.

"Sitting here beside me?" he muttered. "Yes; and passing a cruel judgment upon me, even as I expected. You've no mercy for me. You sit in judgment upon me, rehearsing all my faults, without a thought of forgiveness in your heart. We could never have gone on living together now that you've found me out, and I solemnly declare that it was the expectation of your merciless verdict on my sins that made me shoot myself. I'm glad I did it."

Terence was still lying in the study, on the sofa, where they had first laid him. He had shot himself in the breast, and was mortally wounded. He knew that his end was but a question of hours. As he had flatly declined to be moved upstairs, Jack Syme and the surgeon who had been summoned from Lymport by telegraph had done their best for him, and perforce acquiesced in his wishes.

Towards the two doctors and the servants who had assisted them Terence had shown his old gentleness of manner, praising their skill and thanking them for their care and pains; towards Nell alone he betrayed a bitterness of spirit such as shocked all those who witnessed it.

Good-natured Jack Syme had endeavored to explain to Mrs. Clancy that her husband, though conscious, was really not himself, and had expressed a hope that, were he to sleep for an hour or two, he would, on reawaking, return to his natural state. But the patient had now slept many hours, under the influence of morphia, and his feeling of repulsion towards his wife remained unaltered.

Nor did Nell seem overwhelmed by this unnatural attitude of his; for her own mental state was too strange to permit of much resentment at his alienation. He had made no confession; and none seemed needful. She seemed to know all from the moment when Ezekiel Doidge stood pointing after him from the top of the terrace steps. Nor could she quite grasp the fact that Terence was

really upon his death-bed. The discovery of his incredible duplicity had, as it were, inundated her consciousness, submerging all other things, whether in the nature of fact or fancy. She had lost the power of realizing anything external to this black discovery; and could only reiterate again and again the miserable items of the story, the manifold lies he had told her, his deliberate, long-continued insistence upon Simon's guilt, his cozening of Simon's friends into that belief. Terence had so shocked her out of her normal self that for the time she could hardly believe in her own identity.

But after some time a terrible self-repulsion took possession of Nell, a blank despair at her own hardness.

"They tell me he can hardly live through the night," she whispered many times over as she watched beside him, "yet I don't seem able to believe it. He's going to leave me forever, yet I can only harp and harp upon his baseness. Am I going mad, or am I the hardest and wickedest wife that ever condemned an erring husband?"

After the few words above mentioned there was dead silence in the dimly lighted room. The husband and wife, upon whom was already concentrated the talk of an amazed and horrified district, were apparently sundered so absolutely that the grave could not part them farther.

The whole story was now perfectly well known, for Ezekiel had sent his witness on to Bickington, in accordance with his promise, after the identification of Clancy at the bridge. Immediately thereupon he had himself made straight for Monks Damerel, doubtless possessed by an insane fear lest his revenge should be snatched from him by Captain Rush; and, but for a prolonged fainting-fit at the mill, he must have reached his destination almost as soon as Terence and his two guests.

Upon learning the news of Terence's identification, Captain Rush had himself galloped over to the Hall, hoping to anticipate poor, crazy Doidge and save Terence from the disgrace of a public exposure; but he had only arrived to find that all was over. Afterwards he had pushed on to Moor Gates, and rapidly driven Kate back to Monks Damerel, though, as Nell declined to see even her sister, this well-considered step had been of no avail.

But Nell and Terence gave no thought to what might be going on in the outer world; their own despair was like a dark eddy, round which they were being whirled with deadened hearts, unable to move

hand or foot—face to face, yet with a gulf between them that neither could cross.

When Terence at length broke the silence his strange bitterness seemed to be pricking him like a goad.

"How long is it since Syme left me? How long have I been asleep or unconscious?"

"Many hours! It is now midnight, or close upon it."

"I suppose you have spent all these hours in reckoning up my misdeeds, in comparing me, the sinner, with that immaculate hero-saint of yours, whom I hate now more than ever? Ah! I see by your face that I've guessed aright. I knew well enough what kind of mercy to expect from a virtuous woman. I say again that it is your spotless virtue that has killed me. With a wife more human and merciful, who could have made allowance and tempered judgment with human kindness, I might have repented and confessed long ago. You led me astray with your beauty first—for I loved poor Mary, and never dreamed of evading my solemn promise to her. Yes, but for you, I should have made her my wife, and we should have been happy. I've never been happy with *you*. I never could hope to live up to your crushingly superior level. I repeat, your beauty first led me astray, and then your virtue kept me astray, scaring me into one deception after another. I had to go on lying to save myself from your scorn. Nor did you ever really love me; you had for me only a kind of spurious affection bred of the desire to free yourself from an irksome tie. Had I ever possessed your love—such love as a woman is capable of, and such as poor Mary gave me—I should have made a clean breast of it long ago. Curious, isn't it, that this parting scene of ours should be bringing out the truth like this? And not only do I see the past very clearly now, but I also foresee the future. I know precisely what is coming, perceive it as clearly as though it were actually happening before my eyes."

These last sentences might have given Nell the key to her husband's evil mood, but she was herself too distracted to see through his ravings. Every word he said—for he seemed to speak quietly and naturally, being too weak to raise his voice—was to her absolute truth; and she could hardly breathe under the heavy weight of his condemnation.

She sank upon her knees beside him, moaning, "I am a bad, hard woman, Terence; no condemnation of yours can be worse than that passed by myself. It is true that I have been going over your

faults, that I don't seem able to forgive you. There's no power left me, I believe, but that of merciless judgment."

Then Terence began to groan and writhe with the pain, which had left him for a time, to return now with trebled force, and Nell went sobbing into the other room to fetch the doctor. Syme returned with her at once, drugged the suffering man off to sleep again, and once more left them together.

Nell once more took her place beside the couch, but not the same place. She sat close to it now, with her hand resting upon the coverlet near to her husband's. Her mind was entering upon a new phase, her spirit drawing nearer to his unconscious one, and a strange, pitiful love was beginning to flutter in her heart.

She trembled with fear lest this apparent return to her better self should prove but a passing mood; but time went by and it still held good.

When Terence awoke, his expression was changed; he, too, seemed different, as though her spirit had been working upon his, or as though both had passed under some soothing, mysterious influence, been softened by some "sweet oblivious antidote."

"It was terrible to see you in such pain, Terence. I'm thankful to know that it has passed away again."

Terence's hand moved a few inches and lay beside hers, touching, though not holding it.

"Yes, the pain has left me, Nell; and when it returns you can yourself measure out the morphia, for I want no one else to interrupt us. There is no need to call Jack Syme in. I will tell you exactly what to do. Nell, we must make an effort to wrestle down the barrier that's between us. There's a conflict before us, yet I feel that we may yet attain to peace before we part. Let me know now what Doidge said; tell me the exact words in which he denounced me."

"He spoke no word—not a syllable, Terence."

He gazed at her incredulously, but her pale, solemn face was a clear assurance that she had no thought of deceiving him.

"What can have tied his tongue? I read my ruin in his face. He would never have spared me of his own free-will. What can have hindered his revenge?"

"I firmly believe that he was called away to some better task."

Nell spoke in a clear, low voice, with the reverence of one who touches upon some holy mystery.

"Do you mean that he's dead?" groaned Terence. "Nell, Nell,

his blood is upon my head! I might have saved him. The aneurism must have burst. I always knew he had it, and I never made an effort to save him. No one else knew it. His life was intrusted to me, do you see? and I let him die rather than risk the discovery of my secret. Nell, take your hand from mine; I'm not fit to touch you. I know myself all through now, and find no clean spot in my soul. I did think I had been honest in my profession, but even there I am stained—stained; there's no hope for one so base, so stained!"

Nell knelt beside her husband and wept over him. His despair called forth all the love and mercy in her heart; and he wept with her like a child.

"I must tell you all now, Nell—*all;* and then you'll surely turn from me again."

Then he poured forth the story of his long duplicity—with truth and candor, and a power of self-judgment that had never come to him before; and the bad black Thing that Nell had shuddered at was now seen, not as a great dominating carved figure of treachery, but rather as a strange pathetic one of human weakness—a mournful shape, built up piece by piece, moulded by the unwilling hand of a workman who had many, many times turned from his task, loathing it and himself, yearning often to shatter it to fragments, but too weak to destroy his own miserable handiwork.

"That's *all*," he concluded; "that's the story of my life since I first knew you; and the moral of it is sad enough—that kind feeling and good intentions go for nothing, worse than nothing, without principle and will to back them. You know the worst of me now, Nell, and I can pass into the other state free from the burden of any secret. But I fear you will turn?"

No, Nell did not turn from him now. Sacred tears fell upon his face, his wife's lips met his, breathing tenderness and yearning pity.

"Nell, my own love, what can have possessed me to say those cruel things to you a while back? I scarce know; a demon seemed to possess me. Ah, but I do know, and I'll tell it out straight and plain, for sure I've had enough of covering up my sins! The demon was just jealousy. I felt that you were unforgiving, and that was torture; but something rankled deeper—the thought that my degradation was *his* elevation, that you were longing for *him*, making a martyr of him, setting him up once more upon his pedestal, while I sank lower and lower. I've always been more jealous of him than even you imagined; even now I can't bear to mention his name.

Yes, jealous always. Truth is truth, and I declare I hated him the more for the benefits he heaped upon me. 'Jealousy cruel as the grave?' Aye, and perhaps outlasting it, and verily 'the coals thereof are coals of fire.' . . . But, my love, never give another thought to those jealous ravings of mine—lies, all lies, I say. Your superiority, which I railed at, so far from hurting me, saved me from complete degradation, kept my conscience alive. I've never been quite free from remorse; half my late ambition sprang from the desire to stifle it. Sweet wife, kiss me forgiveness of those lies. . . . Ah, Nellie, you're a good and loving woman!" After a pause he added, "Think how I can best atone to you for those ravings, sweetheart."

"Do not think of me now, Terence; but—but surely an atonement is due to—to some one else?"

Terence understood her clearly, and the light went from his face; he had not exaggerated the power of his jealousy.

"*You* can tell him, Nell—that man, I mean—that I am sorry."

"No one knows whither he has gone; I may never see him again."

"Say that again; it comforts me to hear it. I trust and hope you never will see him again—never!"

"And remember, Terence, that he bore public disgrace for our sake. Surely, oh, surely, there should be public atonement?"

"Would you have the parson preach out my shame from the pulpit? You know well enough that the whole neighborhood will be ringing with my wickedness and his noble generosity—won't that be enough for you?"

"Oh, Terence, you disappoint me. Surely at this solemn time you must be willing to make whatever reparation lies in your power?"

"I'm dying with a load of shame on my name—isn't that reparation enough? If he's as grand and magnanimous as you've always made out, that will satisfy him, I should think; especially as he'll come back, as I know well—and the knowledge is a worse torture than the pain I've been through—to claim *you!*"

She drew away without a word, and a burning blush covered her pale face.

"Nell, Nell, 'tis a shame to hurt you so, but that's what will happen, unless— Listen, now. You urge me to a self-sacrifice that tastes very bitter. I wonder if you desire this so much as to be willing to match it with one of your own?"

"I would do anything to give you ease of mind and cure this terrible craze that possesses you."

"Would you—would you? If I undertook to make the reparation you desire, would you promise me on your honor never to speak to Simon again, to avoid even seeing him, to leave the neighborhood should he ever return?"

"Must I never even thank him for all he has gone through for my sake?" she asked, weeping.

"You may write to him once. Put your thanks into one letter and have done with him and the whole matter forever; then I think I could die in peace."

For some moments there was no sound in the room but that of Nell's sobs, which gradually ceased.

When she leaned over him again she was dry-eyed and deadly pale; and Terence put his arms about his wife's neck, knowing without a word that he had won his desire.

"My own dear love," he whispered, "have I asked too much of you?"

Her face quivered, but he saw that she was steadfastly bent upon making the compact and keeping it. Then the power of self-abnegation entered into Terence's soul like a fire, and burned away at last the mean jealousy that darkened it. With his arms still round her, his heart answering to hers, and with a strange exaltation in his feeble voice, he murmured:

"Darling, you conquer me utterly. Most true and noble wife, I'm not so base as I believed. A weak and erring man, but not so base as to make your pain the price of my right-doing. God forbid that I should fetter you so! Oh, Nell, Nell, you're free, my own love, absolutely free! I'll have no compact with you—I'll make that reparation of my own free will; and God bless you for shaming me into doing my duty! My love, the torture's coming again. Listen, for my strength's failing. Tell the vicar all, and let him make my story public as he thinks best. . . . Sweetheart, kiss me once more, and don't weep so, darling. . . . And remember always that I loved you—remember that, for 'tis the only thing to set against my faults. I love you, I love you—'unto the last gasp, darling.' Who was it said those words? I cannot remember now, but let me repeat them as my own—'unto the last gasp, darling'!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

THERE is no commoner or more conventional phrase than that which describes any given community as being "like one man;" and in the case of Chillington, when the story of Secretan's self-sacrifice and Clancy's duplicity spread through the little community, any one man, almost, might have been picked out to give voice to the sentiments of all.

The town and neighborhood, in fact, received the news very much as any ordinary person of average goodness of heart might have been expected to do. There was first a strong wave of indignation against the real culprit, together with a desire to make amends to the man who had suffered wrongly, whether by his own fault or not. For some eight and forty hours this mixed feeling held sway; then came the news of Terence Clancy's death, and with it a tendency to qualify judgment with mercy. For the ancient sentiment which forbids a man to speak ill of a dead brother is rooted deeply in the soil of human nature; and, though tending somewhat towards injustice to the living—since man would seem to have a certain quantum of judging-energy in his system which must be worked off in some direction or other—is doubtless good at the core. At any rate, when the young squire of Monks Damerel died, the voice of condemnation took a gentler tone, and a profound curiosity as to the rights of the whole matter took possession of the town.

It was understood that Mr. Nelson, the vicar, had been requested by the dying man to make the whole story known, and it was expected that he would do so from the pulpit. But for reasons of his own the vicar preferred to discharge his trust in a manner separate from his office; and, as Clancy's death entailed a new general meeting of the cricket club, he made it known that the opportunity would be availed of for saying what was necessary for the purpose.

When the day came round, and all the neighborhood was once more gathered in the ancient town-hall, Mr. Nelson came forward and quietly made his statement. He explained that he wished to speak as a friend to his friend, not as a pastor to his flock, since his own judgment had erred in common with theirs. They had

all alike assumed silence under accusation to be synonymous with guilt.

After which prologue he told the story in brief, plain terms, putting forward no comments of his own, drawing no deductions, pointing no moral, but allowing the facts of the case to speak for themselves. He was listened to amid an impressive silence.

Afterwards Lord Bridistow rose to his feet and requested the chairman's permission to make a suggestion. It was to the effect that Sir Simon Secretan should be enrolled as their new captain.

"For though it would be but a small step to take," the speaker continued, "I think it would be a step in the right direction. We've wronged the man, and I think we ought to show our sense of having done so. I don't pretend to any better right of judgment than any one of you; I don't even know whether my friend was right or wrong in allowing us to misjudge him so. Perhaps his conduct was quixotic and overstrained, and that sort of thing; but I do think there's a spice of nobility to be found somewhere in it; and I do believe we want a few more such Quixotes just to show us what poor old human nature is still capable of. I don't know where my friend Secretan is. None of us know that. His solicitor, even, is not allowed to know his address, but conducts his affairs through another agent at the Cape. Yet I suppose we can convey to him the news of our decision, and that simple message will suffice to show our wish to welcome him among us again. And, gentlemen, I do believe that if he ever comes back we shall understand our Quixote better, be ready to accept him as one who practises as much, nay more, than he ever preached. I think, though he failed in many of his schemes, he has now succeeded in one thing—that is, in educating us up to the point of comprehending a man made of somewhat finer stuff than ourselves."

Sir Simon Secretan was elected accordingly, with every sign of grave approval, but without applause or further discussion, for the shadow of a recent tragedy hung heavily over the gathering. It seemed but a few days since poor Terence had poured forth his wit and drollery from that platform, and most of those present were glad that a complete revelation of his wrong-doing permitted them to still think kindly of their favorite of yesterday.

This quiet and subdued public meeting was the only event that broke the routine life of Chillington for a considerable time. Ezekiel Doidge's mill, together with all his other property, was sold under the terms of his will, and the son of a Lymport tradesman

reigned in his stead. Mr. Tredethlyn and his two daughters had gone abroad, and it was understood that they were not expected home again for a twelvemonth or more. The Hall at Monks Damerel was in the hands of a care-taker; Moor Gates was let by the month to a family whose respectable dulness tended rather to intensify the stagnation of the neighborhood. Under which circumstances Mrs. French-Chichester fought for some months against a steadily growing depression, then shut up the manor-house and vanished Londonward—just in time, as she herself declared, to escape suicide.

Meanwhile, Chillington wasted much curious speculation upon the question of Sir Simon's return, until, no sign or hint of such a probability being published, even that topic lost interest, leaving the weather, the crops, and the state of trade once more to reign supreme.

When the spring came round again, however, a slight breeze of interest sprang up from an unexpected quarter — the direction of Bickington Park.

It was rumored that the pottering old squire, whose existence was apt to be almost forgotten during his son's absence, was about to become a speculator in house-building. He was going to erect a dozen or more big mansions along the eastern fringe of the property, thus making a kind of fashionable suburb for Chillington, to be occupied mainly by summer visitors from Lymport—in short, a desirable inland health resort.

This report held the public ear and the commercial mind of Chillington for some weeks, when the looked-for suburb dwindled to a mere brace of buildings; and, finally, even that pair of mansions collapsed, leaving but a game-keeper's lodge to stem the tide of a thwarted town's indignation.

Yet things were in reality not quite so bad as this; for the Squire of Bickington did actually contemplate the erection of a large country-house; not in the direction of the town, but away on the farther verge of his property, a narrow strip of which reached down to the left bank of the Culmer River.

He had not as yet quite made up his mind to the step; and, curiously enough, the final decision of the matter rested with Miss Tredethlyn. Not that, as the whole district presently concluded, she was about to marry the squire's son—for that affair has not as yet progressed beyond the point where we last left it—but for reasons that can easily be set forth.

Briefly, then, it must be explained that Captain Saunderson had

by this time so far recovered his health as to feel equal to supporting the rigors of his native climate; and, further, was possessed by a craving, surprising in so delicate a man, to resume the robust sports and pastimes proper to an Englishman. In fact, he was heartily sick of continental lounging, and had joyfully made up his mind to settle at home.

Now, as an ardent Nimrod, he naturally had hankerings after Leicestershire; but honest Mrs. Saunderson had other views, and by judicious handling gently led him to follow the same, while seeming only to be following his lead. For in truth, being a humble woman at the core, she had misgivings as to her reception in the county society for which she thirsted.

"My dear John," as she herself put it with a naivete that no foreign travel could obliterate, "advertisement is the soul of modern life; without it you can't plant a new thing upon the market, anyway. Well, I'm a new thing to society, and maybe not a very high-class article neither—'seventeen under proof when bottled,' as we used to say; and advertisement is what I need. Just as you go to the doctor's to certify the excellence of a new whiskey or gin, so must you go to people in society to advertise, and answer for, *me*. Now, if we go and pitch our tent in a new county, you'll be free to hunt your fill, no doubt, but who'll call on your wife, I should like to know? Whereas, if you take a place in the Chillington district, with my nieces and some of their friends to give me a lift, happen I'll do well enough. You'll get hunting there, too, and salmon-fishing in the Culmer, as well as heaps of shootin'—and my people at Lymport won't never interfere with us. I'll answer for that."

Thus it fell upon a day that Captain Saunderson and his wife drove up to the Falcon Hotel at Chillington, with the avowed object of spending a week or two in exploiting the neighborhood; whereupon Squire Rush, with the intuition of true genius, at once perceived the possibilities of the situation. Julius, as luck would have it, was away soldiering in Ireland at this time, so this deep schemer was perfectly free to work out his plots.

Accordingly, the first thing he did was to install the Saundersons at Bickington Park, and to drive them all round the neighborhood house-hunting. This continued until they had inspected every bit of brick and mortar on the books of the local house-agents; but, alas! the search was in vain—there was nothing vacant at all likely to suit them.

The squire's spirits sank low; but he rallied swiftly, and resolved upon a stroke at once subtle and bold.

First, however, he deemed it advisable to write confidentially to Miss Tredethlyn at Bordighera, with a view to sounding her concerning the proposed scheme, for it was necessary to know clearly how she was likely to receive the seventeen-under-proof aunt as a neighbor.

Kate's reply happened to be satisfactory; and with that letter crushed in his pocket, Mr. Rush stepped up to his two guests and roundly offered to build a house for them of any size and shape and style they might desire. That was how the new mansion on the lip of the Culmer vale came into existence.

The Tredethlyns returned from the Continent soon after the installation of Captain and Mrs. Saunderson in their new home, when Kate at once set about giving a loyal support to Aunt Mary's efforts towards making of herself an article suitable for planting upon the social market.

Nor did the task prove so severe as Kate had anticipated. Money is money, whether poured from the mouth of a vulgar gin-bottle, or emanating from the breeches-pocket of the noblest of Norman ancestors; and Kate found it to contain a power of enlarging a neighborhood's charity such as no human rhetoric could possess. Mrs. French-Chichester came and assisted her zealously; and the gradual, perhaps painful, process of social establishment to which expectation had pointed, turned out to be no more than an easy slide down an inclined plane.

The Machiavel of Bickington watched the proceedings meanwhile from the standpoint of a benevolent spectator; noted with deep satisfaction the growing intimacy between Moor Gates and Culmer Lodge, as the new place was called, and slyly bided his time.

The Saundersons mounted their establishment in the early summer, and were firmly planted in the social soil by the middle of autumn. Julius was to be home for his two months' leave about Christmas-time, when the squire's plan must either be brought to a triumphant conclusion or finally dropped; for Mr. Rush had made up his mind that, were his soldier son to return to Ireland once more a free, unscathed bachelor, he might as well give up his pet scheme in despair.

In due time Captain Rush came home, and the squire's suspense reached the feverish stage. The hunting season was in full swing, the weather open, and Julius appeared to have no thought beyond

the pleasures of the chase. But after some hopeless weeks a cheering frost set in, and once more the squire's courage revived.

Having seen a good deal of Captain Saunderson in the hunting-field, Julius naturally became a frequent visitor at Culmer Lodge as soon as the frost put an end to sport; and, as he came and went, the private league against the doomed man's freedom was working constantly and subtly. Aunt Mary could never get through a week without having dear Kate over to enliven her, and was always getting up some little dance or other entertainment for dear Kate's benefit; Captain Saunderson was under strict orders to press his intimacy with Julius; to the squire was assigned the task of keeping Julius thoroughly well bored of home. In a word, between three or four of them, the stubborn bachelor was successfully immeshed.

In truth, Captain Rush was a very willing victim; and the presence of Kate's homely relative appeared to have just the soothing effect upon his pride which his father had anticipated. He slid smoothly into a picturesque kind of intimacy with Miss Tredethlyn, an easeful relation such as permitted them to show one another those good qualities which they had formerly been at such pains to conceal; and so gradually the barrier between them was worn thinner and thinner, until his attentions became those of a real suitor; after which he was too proud a man to withdraw, even if intimacy had lessened liking, which was far from being the case. Thus it came about one night, on the occasion of a dance at Culmer Lodge, that these tiresome young people, who had given their friends such a deal of unnecessary trouble and anxiety, sank their pride to the betrothal point; and the squire hardly slept for two nights afterwards.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"My dear Kate, allow me to state that this son and heir of mine is shockingly spoiled."

"I believe you're right, Julius; and I think no one has contributed to this disastrous state of things more than yourself."

"Tut—tut, you libel me! Why, every one knows what a stern parent I am?"

"Your wife has yet to acquire that piece of knowledge, however."

Kate had her little son in her arms, and was watching her husband finish his breakfast; and a very handsome, proud, happy young mother she looked. If the courtship of this young couple had consisted of alternate storm and gloom, it was tolerably evident that their three years of married life had been of quite another complexion.

"I repeat," persisted Julius, pushing back his chair and opening his newspaper, "that this young scamp is a positive disgrace to us; and the only question is—who is to bear the blame?"

"Suppose we agree to put it all upon the squire, Julius? You might call him in at once—I saw him pass down the greenhouse not five minutes since—and read him a filial lecture on the spot. It might have a good effect upon this boisterous youth, whom I shall endeavor to keep quiet for the first time in his life while the lecture's proceeding."

"Very good!" said Julius, "I'll follow your suggestion; for the truth is, my father *has* got somewhat out of hand lately. He is not kept in nearly such good order as my troop used to be. I'll call him in at once."

"Call who in, dear lad?" asked the squire himself, stepping through the door which communicated with the greenhouses on this side.

"The Squire of Bickington," Julius answered, looking sternly at his father. "And it is my duty to speak seriously to the old gentleman. I am given to understand that he has been found aiding and abetting a fond mother, and a brace of foolish nurses, in the demoralization of that youngster yonder. I can call half a dozen

witnesses to prove his guilt, and my intention is to make a severe example of him. What have you to say, sir, in defence of this misguided grandfather?"

For a moment the old squire stood holding the door-handle, and regarding his son with a scared and puzzled expression; then a sly smile wrinkled his face, and a gentle chuckle ensued.

"Have you instituted these proceedings against me, Kate? How dare you set one criminal to try another? I'll rob you of that little wretch for a whole morning if you go a-plotting against an old man so; or stay, give me over the precious little lad at once, and I may forgive you this time."

"The fact is," said Kate, with a proud smile at her husband, "we are such an unhappy couple that we're forced to sink our differences sometimes by an assault upon a third party. Little Julius won't come to you—see!"

Little Julius, in fact, sent up a powerful roar by way of protest against the suggested exchange, and had to be propitiated by the hasty offer of some half-dozen light articles; after throwing which upon the floor one after another, he cheered up so far as to consent to be perched upon his grandfather's shoulder for a space.

"There—now that we've settled our differences," said the old man, beaming upon his son and daughter, "I'll tell you both a secret. There's an interesting letter for Kate in my coat-pocket."

"From whom?"

"Ah, that's just what you're dying to know, as I'm quite aware; but I'm going to sell my news. Now listen: you promise to lend me this little chap and his nurse for an hour's drive this afternoon, and I'll tell you!"

"Is it from the Cape?" asked Kate, eagerly. "Has Simon written at last?"

"The letter's from London, so don't excite yourself about nothing, my dear. Why should Simon write? He has forgotten us all long ago. Why, how long is it since he left home?"

"How old is Young Hopeful?" asked the boy's father.

"One year, nine months, and five days, at six o'clock this morning," answered the grandfather, promptly.

"Then Simon has been an exile a little over four years."

"He'll leave his bones in a foreign land, be very sure of that," the squire continued, slyly bestowing a lump of sugar upon Young Hopeful.

"Give me the letter, please."

"Give me your promise first, my dear Kate!"

"You shall have the boy from two till half-past."

"From two till three, or you never see your letter!"

The squire held up the missive enticingly, address downwards, and Master Julius promptly snatched it out of his hand. Whereupon Kate wheedled the letter from her son, and cried:

"Julius, look—look! Simon's handwriting, and the London postmark?"

"Posted by his solicitors, no doubt," Julius answered, calmly.

"Is it, indeed?" Kate laughed, excitedly, as she tore open the letter. Then, after perusing a few lines, this dignified young matron began to dance round the room, crying, "He has come home—poor old Simon! and wants to know whether we should care to have him here for a few days—dear old Simon!—because he has no other friends in these parts to whom he cares to go. Oh, Julius, isn't it pitiful?"

"What's the matter now?" asked Julius, who always waxed provokingly cool when deeply interested. "Is the man homeless, or starving, that you must needs waste pity upon him?"

But Julius could not altogether conceal the fact that he, too, was excited. He and the squire devoured the letter over Kate's shoulder; and all three kept up a running fire of pleased comment as they did so.

"Well," concluded Julius, quickly recovering his usual phlegm, "you had better write to this returned exile in a day or two, though it's evident that he is not over keen about coming down here."

"Write in a day or two?" exclaimed his wife, indignantly; "wire this instant, you mean! Pray ring the bell, Julius, and don't be so abominably cool."

"You're welcome to get into a fume, Kate, without which no woman's happiness is complete; but I warn you that you'll be disappointed. Simon writes calmly, and talks of leaving the country again in a few weeks; and I've little doubt that such is his real intention. It's evident to me that he's wrapped up in this adopted daughter of his, and thinks of nobody else; that he has no idea of settling among us again and renewing old friendships. I notice an undertone of bitterness in his letter, and—"

"Julius, will you have the kindness to adjourn to the stables, or go round the greenhouses with your father? You are only interrupting my household duties here, both of you."

Having thus got rid of her men-kind, Kate despatched her telegram, and fell to ruminating.

Should she send a note over to Monks Damerel to acquaint Nell with this interesting news? No; she quickly decided to take no such step, though the temptation to do so was considerable. In fact, Kate had long ago thought out a policy to meet such an eventuality as this of Simon's return. Conscious of an intense desire to throw him and her sister together, she felt that any step she might take in that direction would only tend to defeat her own end. If Simon ever were minded to return to his old love, he should be left absolutely free. Any hint of leading or persuasion, any manipulation of circumstances, or smoothing of his path, might be fatal.

Nor was Kate at all certain as to her sister's views on this subject. It had been tacitly agreed between them never to touch upon it. Even in their most confidential moments Simon's name was never mentioned.

On her return from the Continent the young mistress of Monks Damerel had naturally been the centre of much romantic interest and curiosity. A little stir was created when she first settled down at the Hall with her father; after which there ensued a pause of expectation throughout the neighborhood.

As a matter of course it was prophesied that Sir Simon Secretan would return in a year or two, and would quickly persuade Mrs. Clancy to once more change her name. The time went by, however, and this most symmetrical arrangement grew less and less probable; whereupon many other suitors began to cast sheep's-eyes towards the beautiful young widow. Indeed, Nell had more opportunities of changing her condition than even this quick-eyed district was ever aware of. But a widow she remained, making no attempt to shut herself up from the world, yet apparently concerning herself very little about it.

On the whole, people were disappointed with Mrs. Clancy of Monks Damerel. They would have liked one extreme or the other; either a woe-begone young widow, living a life of deep romantic seclusion, and only exhibiting a pale interesting countenance to the world at large about once a year, or a dazzling young queen reigning triumphantly—and they got neither.

As the day wore on, and Kate received no reply to her pressing telegram, her excitement increased; for she began to think it probable that Simon would later in the day answer the message in person.

In the course of the afternoon there were a good many visitors to receive, and every fresh arrival gave her a thrill of expectation. Ev-

ery moment, almost, she expected to hear Sir Simon Secretan announced.

But her drawing-room filled and emptied; routine talk buzzed on unflaggingly; and the commonplace decorum of the afternoon was unbroken by anything more dramatic than the announcement of a new engagement.

At length the cup-and-saucer parade was over, and Kate was free to pay a visit to the nursery. But hardly had she time to attract the notice of Young Hopeful, who chanced to be too busy destroying some new toys to concern himself about anything so unimportant as a fond mother, when she was informed of Simon's arrival.

Then Kate sailed downstairs and crossed the hall in a prodigious flutter. Could it really be their old friend Simon, who seemed to have forgotten their existence for four whole years? She felt an odd inclination to run away into the shrubbery, and put off the meeting for an hour or more; but she got into the drawing-room somehow, and there stood Simon, whose warm grasp of the hand quickly proved him to be a man of flesh and blood. For a moment or two Kate could only stare at him in silence; but the self-possession of the big bronzed man quickly restored to her the use of her tongue.

"Dear old Simon—why, how brown you are!"

After a separation of four years the remark seemed absurdly inadequate, and they both laughed heartily.

"Nice change in the weather, isn't it, Kate!" he retorted, by way of keeping up the farce. But she promptly sat him down in an arm-chair, rang for some more tea, and told him not to talk nonsense.

Simon seemed to be changed for the better in many ways, though it took Kate a little time to appreciate this. He was less morbid and dreamy, and there was a wholesome ring in his cordial voice; it was apparent that change and travel had been a beneficial treatment for Timon of Chillington.

When the first excitement was over, and they had settled down to rational conversation, Kate found there was little to tell her visitor in the way of news. He had either kept himself posted up in the affairs of Chillington all the time he was abroad, or had so far lost interest in the place and neighborhood as to lend an unwilling ear to all local news—Kate hardly knew which might be the true explanation. As for his own travels and adventures, he was ready enough to talk of them, as also of his adopted daughter and the progress of her education; and for some time Kate listened with interest to his recital.

Presently, however, a waft of nervous apprehension disturbed her; for in the midst of Simon's discourse she perceived, through the open window at his back, a person whom she certainly wished fifty miles away at this moment—her sister Nell. She heartily wished now that she had warned Nell of this probable arrival, and so given her a chance of preparing for a meeting, the awkwardness of which would now be increased tenfold. Still, on second thoughts, her policy of non-interference could not be other than a sound one—only it seemed rather hard on Nell just at present.

Meanwhile, Nell dawdled slowly across the lawn in an uncertain way, which irritated her sister's tense nerves not a little; and Simon talked cheerfully on without the least suspicion that his listener was on tenter-hooks.

As Nell drew near, her sister rose and walked to the window, hoping to warn her away by a gesture; but the former, upon catching sight of Kate, spoke at once, and then it was too late.

"What is the matter with you, Kate? You look as solemn and portentous as though—"

"There's some one come to see us," said Kate, curtly.

Then Simon rose and walked to the window, and there was nothing more to be done.

Kate stared at them both in a perfectly imbecile fashion, and was unable to help out the awkward situation by a word.

But apparently no help was needed. Nothing could have been, at least on the face of it, more flat and commonplace than this meeting, which should have been a little romance in itself. Simon's opening remarks, for any sentiment they contained, might have been taken straight from a guide-book, and Nell at once fell into his vein. Their greetings resembled those of old acquaintances on a railway platform, who are willing to exchange civilities for a moment or two, but rather hope the arrival of their respective trains may cut them short.

Kate was inexpressibly disappointed.

"To think what he has gone through for her!" she muttered; "and now he won't allow her to thank him even by a glance. He declines even to receive a friendly word for her. She can do nothing in the face of such an iced manner as that. He's more bitter than I had imagined."

The scene was brief as well as commonplace; for, after staying just as long as propriety demanded, Simon excused himself by saying that he was anxious to meet Julius, who was expected home

from the town about this hour, and strolled away towards the west lodge gate with that object in view.

Being thus left alone with Nell, Kate was almost afraid to look at her, yet withal was intensely curious to see how she would take this disappointment. Would Nell wax tearful and pathetic, or would she keep up her pretence of indifference?

Nell was not long in showing the color of her mood. As she stood looking after Simon, who was visible for some distance down the drive, she was panting with indignation, and presently exclaimed:

"It's a shame—a cruel shame to treat an old friend so! And it's not like him to show such unkindness and malice."

"*You* have no right to criticise him!" Kate retorted with some asperity.

"I thought—I did think—" continued Nell; then she stopped abruptly.

"What do you think, Nell? Come, I've never intruded upon your reserve in this connection, so you may as well reward me by making a clean breast of your sentiments. You needn't fear any interference on my part. I shall let you take your own course, whatsoever it may be. Nor could I hinder you, for the matter of that, for you always were a perfect model of obstinacy."

"My course will be no course at all!" cried the young widow, flashing another indignant glance after Simon's retreating figure, "for I will have nothing to do with a man who outrages me so. Kate, I'll tell you frankly what I had hoped!"

"No fear about the frankness, once you've let your tongue loose!" muttered Kate, parenthetically.

"I had hoped that when Simon returned it would be as an old friend; and—and I did hope he would give me some chance of showing my gratitude — and perhaps restoring at last what rightly belongs to him."

"Quite so—I see. That is pretty much the line I thought you would take, my dear. You want to marry him out of gratitude! So far, so good. Any love to be thrown in, may I ask?"

"I've done with all that long ago."

"Ah, just as I supposed! You're so old and ugly now that any thought of romance has now become an absurdity! Well, I quite understand your scheme, Nell, and I tell you at once that it won't do. You want to give him your hand and purse, and keep your heart to yourself. Now, it's quite possible that he knows you well

enough to have made as near a guess at your intentions as I have done, and has put on coldness accordingly. Anyhow, it won't do. You want to treat Simon as a shopman, to whom you owe a good long bill, and for whom you're therefore ready to make some sacrifice, and he's not the man for that kind of barter. Truly, it's a comical situation. In the old days he wanted to marry you, and you couldn't bring yourself to have him; now you want to marry him, and he won't accept you upon any consideration—at least, judging from the first scene of the comedy. You're, in fact, a brace of lunatics, as I always said — a fatuous, high-flown, romantic, ridiculous, tiresome pair—and I'll have nothing whatever to do with you. Fight it out between yourselves by all means; I sha'n't stir a finger to help or hinder. Make him an offer through your solicitor, if it so please you, stating clearly what pin-money you propose to afford him, and explaining that you'll allow him every possible liberty, etc., provided that he's careful not to step beyond the limits of ordinary friendship."

"I shall do nothing of the sort, Kate; nor shall I even speak to him again except as a distant acquaintance. I shall avoid your house until he's gone—and if I do meet him in society—"

"Yes, yes—I know all about it, my dear child. Don't expend all this excitement upon me, for it is a mere waste of time. You won't stay and dine, of course?"

"Is it likely?"

"Not in the least. I only asked as a matter of form. But, as the man will be back soon, and I must think about going up to dress, you had better depart in haste—and by the east lodge, or you might chance to come across Sir Ogre again!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

The family at Bickington found no great difficulty in persuading Simon to extend his visit beyond the meagre seven days which he had originally named as its probable limit. In fact, the returned exile found the atmosphere of the neighborhood far more congenial than he expected.

Perhaps he had not sufficiently taken into consideration how greatly the change in public opinion towards himself would affect the question of his happiness; and had by no means realized how warming to the heart it is to be greeted with marked cordiality by a dozen old acquaintances every time one takes a walk into the town. Probably, also, he had feared to become an object of public curiosity; whereas he now found, to his profound relief, that not even the worst busybody in the place seemed moved to make any allusion to the past. But what surprised him most of all was that almost every one in the neighborhood seemed glad to see him.

Simon's old friend, the Vicar of Chillington, hurried over to visit him the moment his arrival at Bickington was made known, and his long silent hand-clasp was worth many noisier greetings. Lord Bridistow followed almost at Frank Nelson's heels, welcomed Simon as a returning prodigal, and vowed to have him locked up if he ever talked of leaving the country again. Many others, too, came in the wake of these old friends; and Lord Bridistow had cause to repeat a former phrase of his to the effect that Secretan had educated his public up to the point of understanding him. Certainly it did seem that Chillington had added a new item of knowledge to its general philosophy of human nature—namely, that a man who takes upon himself the burden of other people's troubles, and gives time and thought to their alleviation, is not necessarily a hypocrite or a fool.

Moreover, some of Lord Timon's old philanthropic schemes had fructified during these four years. A certain benefit society, which had once barely survived the shattering effects of Mr. Jackson's manipulation, was now in a flourishing condition. As for the farm hospital for the dying, that had from the first been a modest but

complete success; and the greater establishment at Lymport, built a couple of years afterwards by public subscription, undoubtedly owed its origin to Simon's experiment on a small scale at Hollacomb.

Concerning his latest experiment of all, the guardianship of a young child, the general public were naturally little interested; but his friends at Bickington were very curious to see little Rose.

Thus, as soon as Simon decided upon extending his visit, it was requested that the child and her governess should be sent for from town—an arrangement upon which Julius Rush commented to his wife in this wise:

"You'll be glad enough to be rid of her in a week or two—for isn't one spoiled child scourge enough for one household?"

But, to the surprise of every one at Bickington Park, little Rose turned out to be under very good control—a bright and frolicsome child, but certainly better disciplined than Kate at all expected to find Master Julius at six years old.

Simon had always had a knack of refuting the prophecies of critical friends; but even Kate, who always expected a good deal of him, was astonished at his latest achievement. She perceived that he must have studied minutely the art of child-handling, and have bestowed extraordinary care and pains upon the bringing up of this little person, for it was apparent, from the firm hold he had obtained of his adopted daughter, that he must have taken a considerable personal share in her training and education. "And probably," reflected Kate, who was now naturally a student of the child question, "the little one has been at the same time unconsciously educating him."

At any rate, they were all agreed that Rose was a piquant and attractive little creature, and that the relations between the child and her adopted father were of a quaint and Old-World fashion.

The end of three weeks found the pair still domiciled at Bickington, though by this time Simon showed signs of growing restive. His four years of wandering seemed to have unfitted him for settling down finally in any one spot, and their efforts to persuade the wanderer to cast anchor among his old friends seemed to fall upon deaf ears. But, though he continued to speak of his return to the other side of the world as a settled plan, they steadily persisted in their endeavors to undermine it, each of the party pegging away at him in his or her particular fashion.

Julius, who said little in public, would attack him privately, under the friendly veil of tobacco.

"You and I are too old to make new friends, old fellow," he would urge, "so we must even settle down within hail of one another. And your old craze, if a trifle subdued, is still in working order, as I know very well. You'll never be happy without a community of some sort to work for and worry over, and here's a place ready and willing to let you slave in its interests, now that it has learned to understand you. Why, man, you'd take at least a decade to work any new district up to this pitch of receptivity!"

"Why not settle on your mother's old family estate," the squire kept asking, "and oust that intriguing Lady Bountiful of ours, who does a deal more harm than people imagine? Her lease is up in six or eight months, I believe; now, why not offer to release her for the remainder of her term, and live at the manor-house yourself, among your own tenants and people? It's my opinion that Mrs. French-Chichester is staying up in town now merely to avoid you. And if you would but take root here, maybe we should be rid of that dangerous woman for good."

"Little Rose should be educated at home," that was Kate's string, and she harped on it constantly.

Now, which of these argumentative weapons gave the final stroke of grace to his old resolution Simon was never brought to admit; but somehow or other his scheme of a second expatriation came to be quashed. If questioned about it, he would aver that his change of mind must have been due to the weather; for when he at length succumbed, the early summer-tide was just settling down sweetly and shyly upon lush pasture and flower-trimmed hedge and all the bosky curvings of the Chilling gorge; and he freely confessed that he had seen nothing abroad to compare with this "old June weather" in the old country.

Mrs. French-Chichester consented to forego the remainder of her lease for a consideration, and resumed her rôle of Lady Bountiful in another part of the country; whereupon Simon took possession of his mother's old home.

This definite home-coming of Sir Simon Secretan made a considerable stir in the neighborhood, and he soon found the old life, or rather a revised and improved version of the same, sitting comfortably upon him, like some old garment, once cast aside as a misfit, but now donned afresh with satisfaction. Whether the old garment had been cut to his shape, or his own figure had undergone a change, he did not stop to consider, but wisely consented to live his life and enjoy it. He accepted the captaincy of the cricket club, which

Lord Bridistow had long held in trust for him, and the presidency of the Angling Association, as also several other posts which were always open to any one willing to give time and money for the benefit of his neighbors.

Then there only remained for this reclaimed prodigal to take to himself a wife, and certainly a friendly neighborhood seemed bent upon thus crowning his happiness.

For a time, it is true, people held aloof under an impression that he would now revive his old inclination for the lady whom he had jilted, or who had jilted him — nobody quite knew which. But before long it became apparent that he had quite got over that ancient weakness. He met Nell in society several times, and the pair were at first scrutinized with deep interest; but there was nothing in their conduct calculated to cause the least uneasiness to any possessor of marriageable daughters.

Kate remarked, however, that as time went on Nell and Simon did attain to a certain mild degree of mutual friendliness. It being the summer season, when the countryside woke up according to custom, and betook itself to gentle out-door dissipation, and Simon being at this time in great request, and really minded to see something of his neighbors, it naturally happened that the pair came across one another with some frequency. Yet no one could say that Simon exerted himself in the smallest degree to bring about these meetings. He was willing enough, in his present genial frame of mind, to support the boredom of a garden-party, but the presence or absence of Nell thereat seemed in nowise to affect his spirits.

"The fact is"—thus Kate summed up the situation one morning after discussing it at some length with her husband and the squire—"the fact is, Nell and Simon have now reached the highest pitch of intimacy that they will permit themselves; and I've quite made up my mind that nothing will ever come of it."

"Have you?" asked Julius, ironically. "Permit me to doubt that; for a woman's romantic hope has ninety times nine lives. In fact, nothing will ever kill it. You'd hope on, my dear, were these two tottering gray-headed to their respective graves. How often have I insisted that Simon isn't one to take up another man's leavings, the fraction of a woman's heart, and 'orts of her love'? And where's the necessity of marrying him at all? Let him live in peace and forget his old troubles, instead of planting a fresh crop."

"You're really mistaken," Kate insisted. "I have no more hope whatever of destroying Simon's peace in that way."

"But I have," put in the old squire; "and I'm not agoing to drop it to please that captious fellow Julius."

They both turned to laugh at the old gentleman; and Julius pressed with mock eagerness for an explanation.

"You sha'n't bully me into giving reasons for my view of the case," chuckled Mr. Rush; "but maybe I have one or two, though I don't pretend to be as clever as you young people. You let me alone, and happen I shall triumph over you both one of these fine days?"

"Look at the group of aspens yonder," quoth Kate, pointing through the breakfast-room window. "Do you perceive how fast they're mellowing? Well, when Simon first arrived they were hardly in full leaf; and do you suppose he would be all these months getting to the point of a mere cool friendship if he had any warmer feeling to bestow?"

"Don't you be too clever and logical, and all that, Kate, for I'm not agoing to argue with you. You just give me that note for your sister, if it's done, and in an hour or so I'll take it over to the Hall, for Mrs. Nell and I are great friends, and I'm always glad of an excuse for a chat with her."

Later on the squire took Kate's note, and drove away to Monks Damerel.

As he passed through the gates into the main road, and turned his head for a glance back at the house, the old man's face wore a tranquil and happy smile. There was a time, in the consulship of Children and McTavish, when he had hated his home, and dreaded returning to it after an hour's drive; now the Bickington roof covered almost everything his heart could desire.

There was the once terrible Kate, now converted into a kind and affectionate daughter; there was the beloved son, whose countenance he had once been glad to look upon for some four weeks out of the fifty-two, now safely captured and contently established for life beneath his own vine and fig-tree; and up at the nursery window his old eyes could just distinguish the figure of the curly-headed little grandson for whom he had yearned so long and so ardently.

Around him the October sunshine was brooding over stubble and pasture, over quiet homesteads and rick-yards full of piled-up gold, and the solemn tenderness of the waning year wove itself into his thoughts as he drove gently along. To the westward of his route the smoke of Hollacomb Manor rose from its dense hanging woods; before him the great moorland spurs which shut in

Monks Damerel loomed through the warm autumnal haze. He naturally fell to thinking of Simon and Nell, and wondering whether Hollacomb and Monks Damerel would really come together, according to his hopeful forecast.

The squire was tolerably certain that he had seen deeper into the returned exile's mind than either his son or daughter had done, and that Simon's former sentiments towards Nell had really undergone no change; but he was equally sure that the man's stubborn pride would have nothing to say to offers of friendship or gratitude. The question was whether Nell would have anything better to bestow upon her old lover; and the squire had lately been inclined to answer this in the affirmative. For, as a much keener observer than most people imagined, he had gathered an impression that Simon's coldness was in fact in the nature of a well-considered, masterly neglect, which was slowly but surely doing its work with the young widow.

Upon reaching the Hall the visitor was informed that Mrs. Clancy was in the old garden, somewhere in the direction of the bowling-green, whither he at once proceeded in search of her.

Through the pleached alleys of the formal garden the old man paced reflectively along, enjoying its sheltered quietude, and holding Kate's note in his hand for fear of forgetting it.

He presently emerged through an opening in the great yew hedge onto the little raised terrace which ran round the bowling-green; and thereupon a curious feeling that he had walked clean out of real life into a fairy-tale took possession of him.

The green was partly shaded by some ancient ash-trees, but was open on the south side, where a low wall bordered the terrace without interrupting the view of combe and moorland which it commanded. Seated close to the wall, with the mild sunshine flowing round her, was the young widow, with a table and some books at her elbow. Before her, a six-year-old figure, quaintly attired in dead gold and amber as though to match the rich color-chords of the fading season, was playing on the green with a ball and some big nine-pins. On the edge of the grass stood a tall man, watching the busy little figure and placidly smoking.

The visitor paused for a moment as though loath to disturb this idyllic group.

What struck him especially was that they all seemed engaged in ordinary occupations. It seemed improbable that Simon could have come over just once in a way, or that Rose was engaged in a new

game, or that Nell was in the position of a hostess receiving unusual visitors. Judging from the every-day atmosphere of the scene the squire was inclined to infer that it had been enacted a good many times before; and he soon found his guess to be a correct one.

Nell greeted him cordially as usual, drawing a chair for the old squire beside her own; and he settled down with a feeling that he was joining a family party.

Little Rose's prattle quickly disclosed the fact that this game on the bowling-green was, in fine weather, the ordinary sequel to her morning's lessons; that, her books once laid aside, she and Simon were in the habit of crossing the brook which separated the two properties on this side, and making their way hither by a steep path through the woods.

Thus it was clear that Simon and Nell were a good deal more intimate than their observant neighbors and critics were at all aware of. On the other hand, it was equally evident to the squire that they were not lovers. The unexpected visitor's presence gave them no embarrassment whatever; nothing approaching to a tender glance passed between them; nor did Simon's manner exhibit any symptom of a lover's elation. In fact, it soon appeared that his mood was of rather a gloomy shade this morning.

From the conversation that followed the new arrival gathered that Mrs. Clancy and little Rose had been developing a mutual friendship lately, and could now hardly see enough of each other. It seemed that Simon, as has been said, brought the child over almost every morning for half an hour or so, and that she came again with her governess for a longer visit later in the day. The inquisitive old gentleman elicited these details by innocent little questions; he also ascertained that the little programme had been followed for some weeks.

This explanation, he considered, betrayed rather a droll and piquant state of things, of which even Kate had not the least conception. It delighted him to think how Simon had been overreaching all his sharp-eyed neighbors; yet—yet the man puzzled him somehow. Simon's manner was almost harsh to Nell; he seemed to take a pleasure in differing from everything she said, and in drawing little Rose away every time she made a remark to her. Nell seemed pained and depressed at his unfriendliness; and the squire fancied he could detect in her something approaching to jealousy of Simon's affection for the child. She had the air of one who was being purposely kept out in the cold.

"Strange, strange!" muttered the looker-on. "I don't seem to understand the man a bit, for all my boasting; and Nell is in the same predicament. She looked pensive and depressed, poor child, from the first; and now he's making her worse every minute."

"Ah, you want to go home, do you, Miss Fickle?" said Simon, presently, swinging the child to the ground. "There, run and tell Mrs. Clancy you're tired of her already. Take the opportunity of being candid while you're young, for they'll never let you speak the truth when you're a grown woman."

"I'm tired of you already," said the child, obediently, holding out a morsel of a hand to Nell.

Simon laughed harshly. The gentle old squire was deeply shocked, especially when he saw Nell's dark eyes filling.

"Oh, poor Mrs. Clancy—you mustn't be so unkind to her, Rose!" he cried, hastily.

But Simon only laughed again.

"We're all alike, you see," he remarked, carelessly; "nothing pleases any one of us but change. That is the only secret of happiness. Rasselas might have discovered so much without fagging about among all sorts and conditions of people as he did. Look at me now. I'm hardly yet settled in at Hollacomb, yet already growing restless. This sober, pensive kind of weather bores me. There's no variety, no excitement in this dead-alive old country. Is a man to spend his life shooting corn-fed pheasants, and dining with neighbors who are already growing sick of him, boring others as thoroughly as he bores himself? In a year's time, Miss Fickle, yea, in half a year's time, I expect we shall begin our wanderings again. We'll look in at the Cape for a month or two; then, when the inevitable weariness and staleness supervene, move on to New Zealand, as we did before—and so on, and so on; following the old round, accepting the fact that life's a poor dish at best, and change the only salt that makes its flavor tolerable."

"I'm not tired yet—I'll give you a kiss, Mrs. C'ancy," murmured Rose, approaching Nell as though she thought her in need of sympathy.

"You little humbug, don't pretend to be sentimental, when the only thing you really care for is your grub!"

"Don't put her against me," entreated Nell, "for I assure you that I have few enough friends."

"Oh, everybody labors under that sentimental impression," Simon retorted impatiently, "the truth being that there's no such thing as

friendship. We find a man a good listener, or a possessor of the same prejudices as ourselves, or in some way or other gifted with a power of ministering to our vanity and egoism, and we call him 'friend'; and he gives us the same meaningless title on like selfish grounds. And when either party dies, the other says, 'Poor devil!' —and goes on with his book or newspaper."

Nell was now bending over the child, placing the small arms round her own neck. The squire was hovering over her, at intervals throwing a fierce glance at her tormentor; while Simon strode up and down with the aspect of one who is giving his mind to making other people as miserable as himself.

"Why—you're crying, aren't you?" whispered little Rose, in a wondering tone.

Certainly Mrs. Clancy's cheek had a tear on it, and the tender-hearted old man was up in arms immediately.

"You shouldn't pour out your evil thoughts in that harsh, reckless way, Simon!" he cried, wrathfully. "You've no right to hurt people's feelings in this wanton manner. You make me quite wretched, you do, with your cynical remarks. And you can't mean 'em—you can't dare to mean 'em! Look at your friendship for my son—is that all a sham and a delusion?"

"I don't suppose my friendship for Julius will suffice to keep me another day in this country, once I've got thoroughly bored, squire." Simon was now leaning moodily upon the wall, looking away from the others. "Nor do I imagine my departure will affect his happiness very deeply. No, no; self-love is the only love to be found on this planet of ours."

"Well, if those are your sentiments, I don't wonder you're agoing to leave us so soon."

"About next Christmas, I fancy. I shall try and hold out till then, though I'm so dead tired of life here. Now, Miss Inconstant, it's time you completed your farewells, or I shall be getting into trouble with your governess."

But the little woman was concerned about her new friend.

"Poor Mrs. C'ancy!" she muttered, doubtfully; "she was cryin' just now, she was."

Simon stared at Nell surprisedly.

"What! have I been boring you with my fit of the morbids?" he asked. "The fact is, I'm not fit company for anybody nowadays. In future her governess shall bring over this little maid of a morning, Mrs. Clancy—unless you're bored with her as well as with me,

by-the-bye? Speak out, for I sha'n't be offended. We all like variety."

"You're abominably harsh and unkind and unfriendly and churlish!" cried the squire, with his color mounting.

"Don't waste rebukes on me, squire, for I'm going next month—can't hold out till Christmas, after all. I bore you all on this side of the water; whereas, on the other side, they've only half learned to be sick of me. It cheers me to think I'm still almost a novelty over there. Hang it! I shall pack up and go next week."

Upon this the squire was so full of wrath that he feared to commit himself to further speech, but glared at Simon as though he could have struck him.

"I wouldn't treat—an old—friend"—he got out the words presently with great difficulty—"as you've been a-treating our kind and dear and gentle Nell—for—for ever so!"

Nell smiled upon her protector, but his sympathy tended to further upset her self-control. She turned away, and leaned over the low wall as Simon had done a short time since.

"But you don't really care whether I go or not?" asked Simon.

She made no answer. They saw that she was crying.

Then the old man's wrath melted suddenly away, for he perceived a sudden change in Simon's face. There was a gleam of strange happiness in the big man's eyes. He looked as though he were about to step forward and catch the slight figure from the low wall to his heart and never let it go again.

Noting which, the squire walked away along the terrace on tiptoe, feeling somewhat unhinged, yet with a glow of deep satisfaction spreading through him. He knew that his triumph over Kate and Julius was now an assured thing. It might not come yet, there might be months to wait; but he no longer felt any doubt as to its final consummation.

"I'll keep it dark," he muttered, "I'll not tell even Kate. She deserves to be kept out in the cold for her scepticism. How long will it be, I wonder? Will they come to an understanding before the leaves are quite gone?"

He turned for a final glance before passing through the opening in the yew hedge.

Simon had drawn no nearer to Nell. He was standing a little apart, waiting for her to recover, holding his little charge by the hand. The mild sunlight was bathing the old green and the terrace and the three figures by the wall.

"Well, I'll give them till Christmas," concluded the departing squire.

But this old man with the young heart was a little premature in his forecast; for the ash-trees overhanging the bowling-green were budding once more, and the birds in the combe below were singing spring pæans on the morning of his final triumph over his son and daughter.

THE END

WALTER BESANT'S WORKS.

We give, without hesitation, the foremost place to Mr. Besant, whose work, always so admirable and spirited, acquires double importance from the enthusiasm with which it is inspired.—*Blackwood's Magazine*, Edinburgh.

Mr. Besant wields the wand of a wizard, let him wave it in whatever direction he will. . . . The spell that dwells in this wand is formed by intense earnestness and vivid imagination.—*Spectator*, London.

There is a bluff, honest, hearty, and homely method about Mr. Besant's stories which makes them acceptable, and because he is so easily understood is another reason why he is so particularly relished by the English public.—*N. Y. Times.*

ALL IN A GARDEN FAIR. 4to, Paper, 20 cents.

ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 25; 8vo, Paper, 50 cents.

ARMOREL OF LYONESSE. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 25; 8vo, Paper, 50 cents.

CHILDREN OF GIBEON. 12mo, Cloth, $1 25; 8vo, Paper, 50 cents.

DOROTHY FORSTER. 4to, Paper, 20 cents.

FIFTY YEARS AGO. Illustrated. 8vo, Cloth, $2 50.

FOR FAITH AND FREEDOM. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 25; 8vo, Paper, 50 cents.

HERR PAULUS. 8vo, Paper, 35 cents.

KATHERINE REGINA. 4to, Paper, 15 cents.

LIFE OF COLIGNY. 32mo, Cloth, 40 cents; Paper, 25 cents.

SELF OR BEARER. 4to, Paper, 15 cents.

LONDON. Illustrated. 8vo, Cloth, Ornamental, $3 00.

ST. KATHARINE'S BY THE TOWER. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 25; Paper, 50 cents.

THE BELL OF ST. PAUL'S. 8vo, Paper, 35 cents.

THE HOLY ROSE. 4to, Paper, 20 cents.

THE INNER HOUSE. 8vo, Paper, 30 cents.

THE IVORY GATE. 12mo, Cloth, $1 25.

THE REBEL QUEEN. Illustrated. 12mo, Cloth, $1 50.

THE WORLD WENT VERY WELL THEN. Illustr'd. 12mo, Cloth, $1 25; 4to, Paper, 25 cents.

TO CALL HER MINE. Illustrated. 4to, Paper, 20 cents.

UNCLE JACK AND OTHER STORIES. 12mo, Paper, 25 cents.

PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK.

☞ *Any of the above works will be sent by mail, postage prepaid, to any part of the United States, Canada, or Mexico, on receipt of the price.*

THE PRINCE OF INDIA;

Or, Why Constantinople Fell. By Lew. Wallace, Author of "Ben-Hur," "The Boyhood of Christ," etc. Two Volumes. 16mo, Cloth, Ornamental, $2 50; Half Leather, $4 00; Three-quarter Leather, $5 00; Three-quarter Calf, $6 00; Three-quarter Crushed Levant, $8 00. (*In a Box.*)

General Wallace has achieved the (literary) impossible. He has struck the bull's-eye twice in succession. After his phenomenal hit with "Ben-Hur" he has given us, in "The Prince of India," another book which no man will say shows the least falling off. . . . It is a great book.—*N. Y. Tribune.*

A great story. It has power and fire. We believe that it will be read and re-read.—*N. Y. Sun.*

For boldness of conception this romance is unique of its kind. The amount of research shown is immense. The mere *mise en scène* necessary for the proper presentation of the Byzantine period alone involves a life-long study. . . . There are incidents innumerable in this romance, and all are worked up with dramatic effect.—*N. Y. Times.*

Its human interest is so vivid that it is one of those historical novels laid down reluctantly only with the last page with the feeling that one turns away from men and women with whom for a while he lived and moved. . . . A masterly and great and absorbing work of fiction. . . . Dignity, a superb conjunction of historical and imaginative material, the movement of a strong river of fancy, an unfailing quality of human interest, fill it overflowingly.—*N. Y. Mail and Express.*

Politics, romance, religious discussion, war, statesmanship, and love, all have their part as elements of interest, and one may be sure that not Bulwer himself could have treated a notable epoch in history with greater fidelity to established fact or more splendor of constructive imagination.—*Boston Beacon.*

In invention, in the power to make mind-impressions, in thrilling interest, "The Prince of India" is not inferior to "Ben-Hur." The visit to the grave of Hiram, King of Tyre, with which the story opens, at once arouses the reader's keenest interest, which culminates in the closing pages of the second volume with the downfall of Constantinople.—*Philadelphia Inquirer.*

Abounds in scenes that have few rivals outside of the "Arabian Nights." —*N. Y. Herald.*

"The Prince of India" is a succession of Oriental pictures, faithful and ample in detail. It is beyond question an able historical novel, an absorbing theological novel, a refined and lofty love story. . . . Its qualities are thought-arousing, educating, pictorial, spiritually analytic.—*St. Louis Globe-Democrat.*

Published by HARPER & BROTHERS, New York.

For sale by all booksellers, or will be sent by mail, postage prepaid, to any part of the United States, Canada, or Mexico, on receipt of the price.

STANDARD NOVELS IN PAPER COVERS.

CHARLES DICKENS.

		PRICE
Oliver Twist (illustrated)	8vo	$0 50
Martin Chuzzlewit (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
Old Curiosity Shop (ill'd)	8vo	75
David Copperfield (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
Dombey and Son (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
Nicholas Nickleby (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
Bleak House (illustrated)	8vo	1 00
Pickwick Papers (illustrated)	8vo	1 00
	4to	20
Little Dorrit (illustrated)	8vo	1 00
Barnaby Rudge (illustrated)	8vo	1 00
A Tale of Two Cities (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
Our Mutual Friend (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
Christmas Stories (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
Great Expectations (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
The Uncommercial Traveller, Hard Times, and Edwin Drood (illustrated)	8vo	1 00
Pictures from Italy, Sketches by Boz, and American Notes (illustrated)	8vo	1 00
The Mudfog Papers	4to	10
Hard Times	8vo	25
Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy	8vo	10

EDWARD BULWER.

A Strange Story (illustrated)	8vo	50
Devereux	8vo	40
Godolphin	8vo	35
Kenelm Chillingly	8vo	50
Leila	8vo	25
Night and Morning	8vo	50
Pausanias the Spartan	8vo	25
The Coming Race	12mo	50
The Last Days of Pompeii	8vo	25
The Parisians (illustrated)	8vo	60
The Pilgrims of the Rhine	8vo	20
Zanoni	8vo	35

WILKIE COLLINS.

Armadale (illustrated)	8vo	60
Antonina	8vo	40
"I Say No"	16mo	35
	4to	20
My Lady's Money	32mo	25
No Name (ill'd by M'Lenan)	8vo	60
Percy and the Prophet	32mo	20
Poor Miss Finch (illustrated)	8vo	60
The Evil Genius	12mo	25
The Ghost's Touch	12mo	25
The Guilty River	12mo	25
The Law and the Lady (ill'd)	8vo	50
The Two Destinies (ill'd)	8vo	35

R. D. BLACKMORE.

Christowell	4to	20
Cradock Nowell	8vo	60
Erema	8vo	50
Kit and Kitty	8vo	35
Lorna Doone (illustrated)	8vo	40
Mary Anerley	4to	15
Springhaven (illustrated)	4to	25
Tommy Upmore	16mo	35
	4to	20

VICTOR HUGO.

Ninety-Three	8vo	25
Toilers of the Sea	8vo	50

CHARLES READE.

		PRICE
A Perilous Secret	12mo	$0 40
Singleheart and Doubleface, &c. (illustrated)	4to	15
A Hero and a Martyr	8vo	15
A Simpleton	8vo	35
A Woman-Hater (illustrated)	8vo	30
	12mo	25
Good Stories (illustrated)	12mo	50
"	4to	20
Foul Play	8vo	30
White Lies	8vo	30
Peg Woffington, and Other Tales	8vo	35
The Jilt (illustrated)	32mo	20
The Coming Man	32mo	20
The Picture	16mo	15
Jack of All Trades	16mo	15

GEORGE ELIOT.

Felix Holt	8vo	50
Middlemarch	8vo	75
Daniel Deronda	8vo	50
Romola (illustrated)	8vo	50
Scenes of Clerical Life	8vo	50
Silas Marner	12mo	25
Adam Bede	4to	25
Amos Barton	32mo	20
Mr. Gilfil's Love Story	32mo	20
Janet's Repentance	32mo	20
Brother Jacob.—The Lifted Veil	32mo	20

WILLIAM BLACK.

A Daughter of Heth	8vo	35
An Adventure in Thule	4to	10
Donald Ross of Heimra	8vo	50
Green Pastures and Piccadilly	8vo	50
In Far Lochaber	8vo	40
In Silk Attire	8vo	35
Judith Shakespeare	4to	20
Kilmeny	8vo	35
Macleod of Dare (ill'd)	4to, 15; 8vo	60
Madcap Violet	8vo	50
Monarch of Mincing Lane (illustrated)	8vo	50
Prince Fortunatus (illustrated)	8vo	50
Sabina Zembra	4to	20
Stand Fast, Craig-Royston (illustrated)	8vo	50
Strange Adv's of a Phaeton	8vo	50
Strange Adventures of a House-Boat (illustrated)	8vo	50
Sunrise	4to	20
The Maid of Killeena, &c.	8vo	40
Three Feathers (illustrated)	8vo	50
White Wings	4to	20

H. RIDER HAGGARD.

She (illustrated)	16mo	25
King Solomon's Mines	4to	20
Jess	4to	15
Allan Quatermain (ill'd)	16mo	25
Mr. Meeson's Will	16mo	25
Maiwa's Revenge (ill'd)	16mo	25
Col. Quaritch, V.C. (ill'd)	16mo	25
Cleopatra (illustrated)	16mo	25
Beatrice (illustrated)	16mo	30
The World's Desire	16mo	50
Eric Brighteyes	16mo	25

WILLIAM M. THACKERAY.

		PRICE
Henry Esmond	4to	$0
Denis Duval (illustrated)	8vo	
Great Hoggarty Diamond	8vo	
Vanity Fair (illustrated)	8vo	
Pendennis (illustrated)	8vo	
The Virginians (illustrated)	8vo	
The Newcomes (illustrated)	8vo	

WALTER BESANT.

Uncle Jack and Other Stories	12mo	
All in a Garden Fair	4to	
Self or Bearer	4to	
For Faith and Freedom	8vo	
The Bell of St. Paul's	8vo	
The Inner House	8vo	
The World Went Very Well Then (illustrated)	4to	
The Children of Gibeon	8vo	
The Holy Rose	4to	
Katherine Regina	4to	
Dorothy Forster	4to	
To Call Her Mine (illustrated)	4to	
Herr Paulus	8vo	
Armorel of Lyonesse (ill'd)	8vo	
All Sorts and Conditions of Men (illustrated)	8vo	
St. Katherine's by the Tower (illustrated)	8vo	

BESANT & RICE.

Golden Butterfly	8vo	
When the Ship Comes Home	32mo	
'Twas in Trafalgar's Bay	32mo	
Sweet Nelly	4to	
Shepherds All and Maidens Fair	32mo	
The Chaplain of the Fleet	4to	
By Celia's Arbor (illustrated)	8vo	
The Captain's Room	4to	

W. CLARK RUSSELL.

Auld Lang Syne	4to	
A Sailor's Sweetheart	4to	
A Sea Queen	4to	
A Strange Voyage	4to	
A Book for the Hammock	4to	
Wreck of the "Grosvenor"	4to	
An Ocean Tragedy	8vo	
The "Lady Maud" (illustrated)	4to	
Marooned	8vo	
My Danish Sweetheart (ill'd)	8vo	
My Shipmate Louise	8vo	
In the Middle Watch	12mo	
Little Loo	4to	
On the Fo'k'sle Head	4to	
Voyage to the Cape	12mo	
Round the Galley Fire	4to	
The Golden Hope	4to	
The Frozen Pirate (illustrated)	4to	
Mrs. Dines's Jewels (illustrated)	8vo	

THOMAS HARDY.

A Group of Noble Dames (illustrated)	8vo	
The Woodlanders	4to	
Fellow-Townsmen	32mo	
A Laodicean (illustrated)	4to	
Wessex Tales	8vo	

PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK.

☞ *Any of the above works sent by mail, postage prepaid, to any part of the United States, Canada, or Mexico on receipt of the price.*

The Best for Family Reading.

NO publishing house has yet succeeded in ministering, as the Harpers do, through their periodicals, to old and young, men and women seekers for current news graphically illustrated, holars, travellers, and artists, and children of all ages.—*Observer*, N. Y.

Harper's Magazine.

Issued Monthly. $4 00 Year.

Its history is a large part of the literary history of the nineteenth century in America. —N. Y. Journal of Commerce.

Harper's Weekly.

Issued Weekly. $4 00 a Year.

The only illustrated paper of the day that, in its essential characteristics, is recognized as a national paper.—Brooklyn Eagle.

Harper's Bazar.

Issued Weekly. $4 00 a Year.

To take it is a matter of economy. No one can afford to be without it.—Chicago Evening Journal.

Harper's Young People.

Issued Weekly. $2 00 a Year.

HARPER'S YOUNG PEOPLE *contains a marvellous amount of healthful and interesting reading for young people of all ages and both sexes.*—Boston Journal.

669

Booksellers and Postmasters usually receive Subscriptions. Subscriptions sent direct to the Publishers should be mpanied by Post-office Money Order or Draft. When no time is specified, Subscriptions will begin with the current nber. Postage FREE in the United States, Canada, or Mexico.

PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
00023226996